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Banding Together

by blinkingbrave

Summary

Fire Emblem Awakening Modern AU. Join Robin as she acclimates herself to life as the new transfer to Ylissian North High and as the conductor of the school's newly formed pep band. With the help of her brother Robert and her eclectic band mates, will Robin create a band to be proud of?

Notes

Obviously none of the characters here are mine... Blah, blah, blah.

Enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

Welcome to Ylissean

"You'll love it here… Really. I do. Just give it a little time." Robert gave his sister a comforting smile as he climbed up the steps to Ylissian North High. He had already begun to turn around, but Robin rolled her eyes at his back anyways. They may have had the same silvery hair and fair complexion, but being twins hardly meant they were the same. Robert, with his perpetual good nature and poor posture-too many books-, Robin knew, was the 'happy' twin.

She stole one glance at the sturdy building and sighed. In the name of space conservation, the architect had decided to pile floors on top of floors, creating a giant brick tower peppered with long windows. The mess was an eyesore, and it didn't bode well for any creativity inside. "I don't want to be here."

"School?" Robert teased. He hopped up a few more steps and turned back to his sister. Even after their year of separation, Robert's insufferable, omnipresent sense of humor was still running strong. Joy. Robin rolled her eyes again, making sure Robert actually saw it. "Few people do." And he continues anyways, Robin thought drily. At least he had grown a backbone while she was gone.

"No. I don't want to be here. Here, specifically," Robin replied. Perhaps dry, boring bookworms like her brother could work in that brick monstrosity, but Robin could already weep for... for everything. She missed Plegian. Shifting her backpack on her shoulder, Robin strode ahead of her brother and into Ylissian. Spinning a circle in the main lobby, Robin sighed. The interior was just as stifling as the exterior, brick, brick, and more brick. It was still too early for students, and those that loitered in the hallways yawned at her. "Which way is the piano?"

Robert laughed. Of course something was funny about her desire to confirm that there was at least one good thing in this institution. There was always something funny with Robert. Three days back, and it was driving her up a wall. "We walked here early so you could talk to our homeroom teacher and get your class schedule. I'll show you the music room later." And his goody-two-shoes routine. That wasn't getting on her nerves either. Nope. Robin frowned but followed Robert as he turned down one of the hallways. Lockers lined the halls, and the occasional student dotted the hallway. Opening a classroom door, Robert gestured inside. "This is our homeroom. Now that you're here, I'm going to catch up with some friends of mine. Text me if you need me. Okay?" Robin skirted around Robert and his cheery smile wordlessly.

The room was deserted. Robin slipped her nearly empty bag on to a nearby table and slid onto a stool. Instead of desks the classroom was filled with long, perfectly aligned tables. Someone, Robin supposed, had too much time on their hands, if they felt compelled to straighten the tables so exactly. Cabinets filled with labelled jars and scientific equipment lined the sides of the classroom. A jarred fetal pig peered out at her from the nearest counter, dead pig eyes mirroring Robin's.

"Miss Robin?" Robin spun around in her seat. A reserved woman, tall and severe, looked down at her. Raising a hand to her glasses, the woman frowned. "Miss Robin. This is indeed who you are, yes?"

"Ah, yes ma'm. My brother Robert…" This was the authority, then. For a teacher, the woman was surprisingly young, and despite the best efforts of her highly conservative clothing and expression of general distaste, she looked in her mid twenties. With a sharp slap, the teacher deposited a thick stack of papers on the table.

"I am Ms. Miriel Platt. You may address me by either name. Pleased to make your acquaintance."

Opening her mouth to reply, Robin closed it as her instructor continued on. "Read the papers I have given you. All of them. They will be crucial to your integration within our school system," Ms. Miriel said. Robin glanced down at the huge stack of papers and slumped a little lower. Ms. Miriel frowned, and Robin straightened herself again. "I also noted your first class, Biology, is in attendance with me. Therefore…" Ms. Miriel bent into one of the cabinets and pulled a thick textbook from a shelf. She strode over to Robin and delicately placed the book in front of her. The gecko on the book's cover pleaded at the student through a thin film of dust. "I will bestow this upon you now." Ms. Miriel took a seat at the lone desk at the front of the room. "That is all, Miss Robin. Enjoy your sophomore year at Ylissian."

Robin sat for a few minutes in silence, but Ms. Miriel didn't look up. Collecting her things in her bag, she saw Robert had texted her. "If you finish up early, come find me. I'm outside, by the tree. Just take a right and keep going." Robin could imagine the words in her twin's voice, perhaps accompanied by a dopey smile. When would he realize she didn't want to make friends? Pulling her locker combination from her pile of papers, Robin strode out of the classroom. The lockers lined the halls in two stacked rows. With a sigh, Robin bent down to a lower locker. A boy reclined on the locker to her left, and Robin was careful to avoid eye contact. Despite her best efforts, Robin found her locker impossible to open.

"Geez, Robin. Are you taking all your books home with you?" Robert asked. He was like a small puppy, Robin decided, all pleading eyes and piteous whines. All Robert was missing was a wagging tail, and no one would be able to tell him from a Labrador. "You received a locker, right? Do you need help with it?"

"I'm fine," Robin said. She squared her slumping shoulders, shooting Robert a scowl as she almost stumbled under the weight redistribution. Plegian didn't have lockers. Probably because the school was inherently better and didn't need to torture its students with inoperable metal contraptions. "Now, where did you need to go?" She rearranged her bag, now heavy with books, on her shoulders. Robert frowned lightly but started walking down the hall. Robin trailed after him.

"How was your first day of class? If you need anything… Well, I know public and private schools are different, so…" Robert let his sentence dangle awkwardly. The boy rolled his shoulders, rippling the loose fabric in his t-shirt, some Star Wars thing Robin figured he would grow out of in the year she was gone. Instead, Robert was essentially the same person, the sweet, nerdy baby she had left a year ago. The only thing that had grown about him was his height.

Robin chewed on her lip. Robert genuinely wanted to make her feel welcome. Trailing behind him, she watched him tug on a few strands of pale hair, long fingers mussing the back of his already messy bedhead. "You worry too much."

It must not have come out as gruff as Robin wanted, because Robert grinned at her over his shoulder. "Consider it pay back for the thirteen years you worried after me." The childhood card. Robert never understood a year of separation and their parent's divorce had long tainted that for her. Robin blinked to find Robert looking to her expectantly, hand resting on a classroom doorknob.

"What?"

"So, the music room… Well, this is it…" Praise the gods. Perhaps Robert wasn't completely useless. Robin started towards the door, but Robert kept it shut. "Thing is, students aren't allowed to use the school facilities after school hours…" Robin narrowed her eyes. Only in a middle of nowhere, one-light town… "Vandals... The joys of public school, eh?" Robert bubbled out a nervous laugh before clapping a sheepish hand over his mouth.

"That's idiotic. I'm going in there anyways."

"Wait—"

Robert moved to block her, but Robin pushed him out of her path. Swinging open the door, she strode inside. An ebony piano stood in the center of the room. Despite her initial opinions of the school, the instrument was surprisingly beautiful. Someone in this hellhole kept it carefully maintained. Robin drifted towards it, just to run her hands over the keys, but instead of an empty bench, a student sat in front of the piano, reclining on the closed key cover. Robin stopped, Robert colliding with her back. Resting an elbow on the piano, the boy studied her with a confident gaze. "This your sister, Robert?" he asked.

Robin began to twirl to face her brother and froze. A small group of students hovered at the side of the room. One or two smiled at her. Whipping around to Robert, she found him studying the floor, hand lost in his hair. She glared at him. "What's this?" Robert looked up at her, but Robin spun to face the boy by the piano. "And you," she hissed, "why is your bare elbow resting on the piano? Does it look like an arm rest?" The boy straightened up, guilty grimace screwing his self-assured gaze. Robin flicked her eyes up and down the boy. Deep blue hair, sleeveless shirt displaying toned arms, general air of self-confidence. Was this what the delinquents here looked like? Turning to Robert, she swung her arm across the students lounging in the music room. "Explain."

Robert glanced apologetically beyond Robin, to the boy sitting at the piano. "I was trying to, but you charged in." Robin refused to lighten her expression. "Students aren't allowed in classrooms after hours, regularly. However, students in clubs are allowed use of school facilities, even on days where clubs don't meet. I knew you would want to use the piano, so I signed you up for something with me." Robert locked eyes with his sister. He faced her squarely, but the concern in his eyes belied his confident exterior. "It's not what you're used to, none of that fancy music academy stuff." Robin folded her arms over her chest. "But it'll get you piano access."

"The catch?"

"Conduct our pep band," the boy behind her cut in, his deep voice silencing Robert. Pushing himself up from the piano, he sauntered over and stuck out a hand. The light muscles in his arm rippled at the motion. "I'm Chrom, the organizer and a friend of your brother. Nice to meet you."

Robin stared at his hand. "Sleeveless clothing is against dress code. I read the rulebook." It was the first thing that came to mind. "I thought all of my brother's friends feared the sun." Aaaand there was the second. The corners of Chrom's mouth twitched, and wow, did that smile do good things to all of him. The boy was a blue haired Apollo. Shaking her head, Robin looked towards the others in the room. "Your band only has eleven people in it. None of you have instruments out. You were leaning against that poor piano…" Chrom grimaced at that. "That olive haired boy in the back appears to be asleep. Why are you all even here?"

A redhead jerked upward. Eyes narrowed in a scowl, the girl thrust one hand on her hips and the other out at Robin. She was easily just as muscular as Chrom, and her own tank top and athletic shorts combo complemented her build. "Oi! Why dontcha cool your pretentious-"

"Sully." Chrom held a hand out to silence the girl, and Sully quieted. Robin raised her eyebrows at him, and Chrom smiled in return. The redhead glared venomously at a music stand, arms folded across her chest as if holding in her objections.

Frilly dress twirling around her knees, a blonde girl, younger than the rest, bounced up to Robin. Rocking back and forth on heeled boots, she smiled at Robin. "We were waiting for you," she

chirped. "I'm Lissa, Chrom's younger sister and another friend of your brother." Lissa's smile was infectious, and Robin found herself fighting the urge to return it. "I know we look kinda hopeless right now, but we've all got instruments we can play. And Robert," Lissa grinned at the boy. Her brother ducked his head with a light blush. "Well, he's been telling us how wonderful you are. With your direction, I'm sure we could whip up a half decent band."

"The time commitment we need is little," Chrom cut in. "The tunes are simple. We practice today, tomorrow and Wednesday, so you can have the other days free. We play at some sports games and maybe some other venues, low key stuff. We don't have many members now, but the school has never had a pep band before this. With time, we should get more members."

Lissa snuck over to bounce beside her brother, and the two of them eyed Robin with equally pleading looks. Robert sidled next to Lissa, fidgeting with his hair yet again. Robin looked at the trio and beyond them to the piano. The piano… She wouldn't last a week without her fingers on those keys. "Fine," she sighed. It wasn't like they asked to sound good, after all. Just half-ass the mess and bury myself in the piano after, Robin figured. "But if I'm conducting this, you do what I say." Lissa squealed, pulling Robin into a hug.

Fiddling with her locker, Robin sighed as the first bell rang. With a dark glare, she kicked the devil thing, but all it earned her was a sore toe. "Need help?" Spinning around, Robin found herself staring into a smiling, vaguely familiar face. It was a boy from yesterday, Robin decided, tall, lanky, easy smile. As he pushed some olive hair out of his eyes, Robin had a horrible suspicion the boy wanted to befriend her. "Stahl, by the way. In case you forgot. Robin, right?" His gentle eyes looked from Robin to the locked door in front of her, and Robin stepped a little further from the locker. Robert must be using this boy to snoop on her. "Seriously, do you need help?"

Stahl was just barely tall enough for Robin to have to tilt her head slightly to meet his gaze. "Thank you, but I'm fine," she snapped. As she had told Robert, yet again, last night, she wasn't interested in meeting his friends. Hopefully, this boy could catch a hint. Before Stahl could respond, Robin strode around him towards biology. After a few beats, Stahl caught up with her, trailing behind the girl. Twirling around, Robin came to a halt outside her classroom. Stahl nearly stumbled into her. "Why don't you stop following me, and just go to class. Whatever Robert may have told you, I don't want to be your friend."

Stahl held up his hands, long fingers splayed out. "Hey, that's what I'm trying to do. You're kinda standing in the doorway." Blushing, Robin found a stool in biology, and Stahl sat next to her. Instead of starting conversation, Stahl seemed content to sit in silence. Casting a sidelong glance it him, Robin found him absorbed in a muffin. A tactic to sweat her out, or simply a statement that she was, in fact, less interesting than a blueberry muffin? If the boy was going to insist on sitting next to her, he needed to acknowledge her. Nothing was more awkward than sitting next to an unacknowledged acquaintance.

"Sorry," Robin mumbled. She caved first. Definitely not because she had snapped at him to begin with. Stahl gave her a fleeting glance before pulling off another large muffin crumb. Robin supposed it was a sign to continue. "I'm just a little used to Robert meddling."

Stahl shook his head. "No worries. I think everyone's been on the receiving end of Robert's doting at least once." The boy's crinkly smile was like Robert's, one that turned his eyes and mouth into scrunched crescents. "He devoted an entire semester last year to keeping me awake during our third period. I was so shell-shocked by the end that I had to sleep through fourth entirely to make up for it."

Robin chewed on her lip as Stahl began to flip through his notebook. It seemed he wasn't a bad

person. At least one content enough to leave their social situation precisely as it was, and Robin didn't want friends. "May I… get the biology notes from you?"

"Only if you buy me dinner first." Robin blinked, as Stahl met her gaze with an utterly straight face. Then he broken in to a chuckle. "You just said it so seriously. Lighten up. I won't bite." Blushing under his laugh, Robin took the proffered notebook. It appeared her initial assumption was correct. Stahl wanted to be her friend.

After school, Robin strode into the music room to find her musicians milling about aimlessly. As she closed the door, Chrom and Robert approached her. From behind them, Stahl smiled and waved. "Okay. Tell us what to do," Chrom demanded, folding his bare arms over his chest. The other musicians looked to Robin expectantly.

"Well…" Robin trailed off. Well, I'd really just like to play the piano, she finished silently, but since I've been roped into this… "What have you guys been doing?"

"Usually, we get out our instruments and play through our pieces once or twice, but we were looking forward to any ideas you might have," Robert said. Lissa had snuck over again to bounce by Robert and Chrom's shoulders. Great. So not much, Robin surmised. Chrom, Lissa, and Robert seemed to be the leaders, and unless Chrom or Lissa had a musical background, Robin suspected the band was running off of Robert's three years of clarinet lessons. Not bad, but not good either.

Robin sighed as the three continued to watch her with hopeful eyes. "Last year I was in an academy for serious, classically trained young musicians. Not only was everyone experienced, the academy was solely for musicians. We had no sports teams and thus no pep bands. My training may not be appropriate for your goals." She crossed her arms and pursed her lips at the crestfallen faces in front of her. They couldn't be serious. A few more harsh words, and perhaps Robin could just have the music room to herself, no band involved.

Chrom frowned at the ground for a moment. Then he jerked his head up. Instead of acceptance, his firm jaw was set in a determined line. "Let's try your way and see what happens." As he spun around to the rest of the band, Robin groaned. "Alright everyone, let's get our instruments, some stands, and some chairs arranged. Warm up and be ready to play in five minutes."

They complied immediately. Robin made a mental note to ask Robert about this later, about Chrom's relationship to this group. At the moment, however, there was little to do but watch them set up. As unwilling as she was to admit, the group's teamwork was superb. They passed out chairs and stands in a neat assembly line, and soon the band was seated. In the center of their semi-circle was a music stand, Robin supposed intended to be the conductor's.

Robin stepped up to the stand. "First, I understand this is a small group, but it would be easier for me if you were seated in a more logical style." She looked to Stahl, the redhead sitting next to him, and the serious boy next to her. "Baritones, Stahl…" The boy light up almost immediately. She had remembered his name, Robin realized with a small curse. Robert would never let her hear the end of this, her sudden new-found friend. The redhead, with little patience as Robin recalled, raised an eyebrow. "Sully?" The redhead seemed appeased. "And…" On Sully's left, the serious boy sat even more stiffly. "Um…"

"Fredrick," he supplied gravely. Robin eyed his collared shirt and vest apprehensively. The boy himself seemed comfortable, but he was so well-built the vest strained across his chest with every inhale. A button was going to pop and blind someone someday.

Robin nodded. "Right. Stahl," The boy smiled at her again. "Sully, and Fredrick. You all may move to the back." The trio juggled their stands, baritones, and chairs to the newly made back

row. "Chrom…" The trumpet player shifted in his seat. "Move to the back." Chrom followed the baritones' path to the back and arranged himself next to Fredrick, who gave him a smile so slight Robin almost missed it. "Drummer, I mean Vaike, you move, too." The blonde adjusted his snare drum in its harness and stomped next to Chrom. "Alright, flutes and clarinets stay where you are," Robin ordered. Lissa continued kicking her legs back and forth, as her fellow flutist, Maribelle, primly crossed hers. Resting his clarinet across his lap, Robert nodded at Robin. The short freshman next to him, Ricken, Robin amended mentally, started flipping through his music with concentration. "Mellophone… Sorry, Sumia, right?" The girl jerked up, knocking over her music stand in the process. "Actually, you can stay there." Sumia blushed sheepishly as Robert and Chrom helped collect her music. Robin turned towards the last musician, a trombonist who at her gaze winked at her. Apparently, her tongue-lashing after the trombonist had kissed her hand yesterday had little lasting effect on the flirt. "You can stay where you are, too, Virion," she ordered with warm cheeks. Robin surveyed the newly ordered group. "Now—"

"Wait! What about me?" Robin nearly jumped as a tuba player, rather tall, popped from behind Maribelle.

"I… I'm sorry, must not have seen you there," Robin said, an impressive oversight seeing as the boy was large in every dimension. And carrying an oversized shiny instrument besides. "You're new, I suppose. I'm Robin. Nice to meet you."

"Actually, I met you yesterday." The boy scuffed at his shoes as Robin tried to place his face. It was incredibly ordinary. So incredibly ordinary it was like saying a word over and over until you weren't quite sure it even was a word. This was a face she knew, but it just kept slipping her grasp. "S'okay. Everyone does it. I'm Kellam. Should I move to the back, too?"

Robin frowned. "Well, I'll remember you. Go on and sit in the back." Wait. I'll remember you? This is a get in, get out operation, Robin reminded herself. Not here to make friends. Making friends meant Robert and Mother were right, that Robin needed more than music. Which she didn't. Robin amended her mental band member list to twelve anyways.

The next day found Robin at her locker, struggling with the lock, as Robert covered a small smile. "You sure you don't need help?"

"Why does everyone ask me that?" Robin huffed. "I can open a locker just fine."

"Your music school didn't have them, though, so how do you know?" Robert pointed out.

"Whatever. I don't need to use it now anyways," Robin stood up abruptly and heaved her bag over her shoulder with a small grunt. "I'm going to the music room."

"Oh, no you're not," Robert grabbed Robin by the wrist and tugged her after him. "Today you're hanging with my friends before class."

Robin scowled. "I have yet to play that piano."

"Well, it's not going anywhere," Robert joked. Pulling Robin out into a small courtyard, Robert led her towards a large oak tree. Chrom leaned against the trunk as the blonde, Vaike, Robin reminded herself, chatted with him animatedly. Lissa, Maribelle, and Fredrick held their own conversation nearby. Noticing the twins, a beaming Lissa jumped up and down, waving at them.

"Heeeeey!" Lissa's chipper voice pierced through the early morning courtyard fog. A few other students turned towards her, but Lissa ignored their stares. She bounded up to Robin and Robert and looped an arm through Robin's own. "I knew Robert would get you here eventually. Come

chat with everyone." Before Robin could respond, Lissa dragged the girl towards the group.

"Morning." Chrom nodded at Robin, then at Robert. Robin ignored Chrom's poorly hidden grin as she wrenched her arm from his sister's grasp. He mouthed something that looked like 'Strong grip.' Ignoring that too, along with the sympathetic headshake, Robin scowled at all of them. "Vaike and I were just talking about the freshmen on the cross country team. You run, Robin?"

Chrom was either extremely dense, socially unaware, or very friendly, and Robin was suspicious it was a combination of the three. Perhaps if she was cold enough, the boy would leave her alone. Crossing her arms over her chest, Robin shook her head. "Sports aren't really my thing."

Vaike grabbed Robin's arm and held it up. "I coulda told you that, Chrom. Look at her… and her brother for that matter." As Robert tugged on his hair sheepishly, Vaike shook Robin's arm. What little extra fat she had jiggled in indignation. "Sticks, the both of them." Robin snatched her arm from Vaike with a glare. Just because he resembled a blonde ox didn't mean the world should be formed entirely of blue-haired gods and Norse myths. "Don't frown at me. Eat more meat or something."

Robert drifted off to talk with Lissa, leaving Robin with Vaike and Chrom. The conversation died off. Chrom seemed content to watch the greyish clouds float by. Vaike scowled at the ground, hands thrust in his cargo shorts. Kicking a patch of grass and dirt, Robin nearly flinched as Chrom piped up with, "We aren't the only ones who run cross-country. Sully and Sumia do, too."

Vaike clapped a hand on Chrom's shoulder. "This guy is co-captain of the team with one of the juniors." Chrom studied the ground, a light blush decorating his cheeks. "He doesn't like to brag about it. Not only that, but during track season, Chrom and I are locked in deadly combat for fastest hundred meter dash. Pretty good for sophomores, eh?" Vaike stuck his hands on his hips and puffed his chest out a little. He looked to Robin.

"Uhhh… congrats?"

"That's right. You ever need a helping hand getting into shape, just give ol' Teach a call." Vaike grinned and flexed a little. Robin studied her thin, pale arms, fairly certain she had never been able to flex, ever.

"You look fine," Chrom cut in. "Girls don't need to be buff, anyways." Robin broke away from her reverie to look to Chrom. At her gaze, his face turned a little pink once more. "Not that guys need to be buff. Or girls can't be buff," he stammered. "You would look weird muscular anyways. Or, it could be fine. I'm sure you would look great with muscles. But you don't need muscles." Chrom seemed even more flustered than when he began. Weren't ridiculously handsome people supposed to be suave? Vaike was frowning at him.

"Teach doesn't quite know where you're goin' with this, Chrom," Vaike grunted. The first bell rang.

"I-I'm going to homeroom." Chrom rushed off, face very red. Vaike shrugged and ambled off in another direction, with a wave to Robin. Gods, what had she gotten herself into?

Sumia's Dedication

Homeroom was one long lecture on the PSAT. Robin may or may not have spent the ten minutes watching Robert doodle next to her. At the bell for first period, her twin brother hovered by Robin's shoulder, playing with his hair once again. "Don't you have a class to go to? Mine's right here."

"Yeah, but…" Robert drummed his knuckles against the table as biology students began milling in. "Just, thanks for conducting our band. We could really use your help." Robin snorted. The band needed a lot more than her help. It was a small disaster. "Also… well, you should lighten up on Mom a little." Robin's eyes shot from Robert's hand to his face, and her mouth sunk into a scowl. His face was filled with genuine concern, of course. Less than a week back, Robert was already lecturing her. Ever the mother hen. Mother herself, however, much like every other aspect of her life her brother snooped in, wasn't his business. As she began to reply, Robert scrambled out of the room.

Stahl dropped his bag on the table with a hard plunk and a soft smile. Even more rumpled than yesterday, his olive hair stuck out at odd angles. He must have slept through homeroom, Robin decided. Not that it mattered. "Morning."

"You don't have to sit next to me," Robin said. Her harsh tone cut through the sleepy classroom haze, and the students shuffling in cast her glances. Unfazed, Stalh collapsed on the stool next to hers with a large yawn. Whatever Robert was using to motivate this boy to befriend her, it must be something powerful. Usually a few icy words were enough to alienate classmates, friends, family. Her mother.

"Actually, you have my class notes. I need those back," he replied, smile warm despite her cool. As Robin dug through her bag for his notes, Stahl glanced towards the door. Looking for Robert perhaps, Robin wondered. "Not a morning person?"

"Not a questions person. Here are your notes." Robin slid a small stack of papers towards Stahl. The boy crammed them back into his bag, unperturbed by the crinkle of wrinkling paper.

"Thanks." He was still rifling through his bag for something, but in its state, overflowing with loose sheets of paper and random trash, his search was taking longer than Robin was sure it should have. An apple rolled out from the mess, and Stahl simply shrugged.

"You ever heard of this little thing called organization?" It spilled out before she could stop it. Fiddling with her pen, Robin cast Stahl a sidelong look. His hair obscured most of his face, but his light smile peeked through some strands. Deepening her frown, Robin ignored the blush blooming in her cheeks. "What?"

"Nothing," he replied. As he brushed some hair out of his eyes, Robin could see them crinkled into crescents again at his smile. "You're just funny, is all."

"I… What?"

Still grinning, Stahl shook his head. "Never mind." He pulled a bagel out of his bag. "Want half?"

As Robin determined yesterday, the band members proved to have varied experience with their instruments. Robert, who Robin knew had taken music lessons in middle school, and, more surprisingly, Virion were the best players in the group. Most of the musicians knew their basic

scales, and a smattering had good intonation besides. However, there were a few amateurs. Well, Robin amended, there was one very definite amateur. On a rather bad note, Robin cut the group off. "Let's take a break." The group relaxed a little, and some struck up small conversations. Sidling around her stand, Robin halted in front of the offending player. "Sumia," she said, resting a hand on the girl's music stand. Sumia looked up from the sheet music she had been studying to meet Robin's eyes. After a moment the brunette looked away with a grimace.

"I goofed up again, didn't I?" Fiddling with the hems of her sleeves, Sumia set her mellophone to the side. Everything about the girl was soft, her delicate voice, her carefully curled hair, the purple cardigan pulled over her faded denim shorts. This was probably a girl who cried.

Robin chewed her lip. More than a few curious glances were being cast in their direction. Robin didn't want to be responsible for the mess that could stem from her public embarrassment. "Let's talk outside for a sec." Robin strode out of the room as Sumia fumbled after her. Turning into the hall, Robin shut the door behind them. Sumia, despite her taller stature, seemed to take up less space, all folded in upon herself. "I'll be blunt. I'm not entirely sure why you're here."

"To play music," Sumia replied, a hint of misery in her voice, eyes on the floor. In the empty hallway, the girl's voice sounded even more piteous.

"Look me in the face when you say that," Robin commanded. "Be serious or go home. I'm not here to coddle Robert's friends. If you can't pull your weight, then I have better things I could be doing."

Sumia snapped her eyes upward. Robin was relieved to see that they were dry. Crying people were never her forte. "I'm sorry. I want to play music. I want to be helpful," Sumia replied again. As she spoke, the girl straightened, hands at her sides balled into fists. Her confidence shown in her mouth, a firm line.

"Mellophone is a marching specific instrument. What did you play before this? Perhaps the two are relatable?" Robin asked. Once again, Sumia shrunk in upon herself. While the girl was pretty in an unassuming way, her frown marred her smooth skin with a wrinkled forehead. "Well? I don't have all day."

"Nothing. I taught myself how to read music last week," Sumia mumbled. Well. That added an entirely new bottom level to the mental skill tier Robin kept of the band. And also explained why every note the brunette played was a wrong one. "I'll try harder. I promise."

"Don't try harder. Practice more," Robin said, ignoring the girl's cringe. "If you want to be here, prove it. And stop cowering. Confidence." Turning on her heel, Robin left Sumia in the hall. Gesturing the band to attention, Robin tossed a glance to the door. Sumia never reentered. For the best, then, Robin decided. After all, her only goal was to get through these practices, not reshape the musicians in it. Her stomach felt a little cold anyways. At the end of their session, Robin watched Sully pack Sumia's mellophone and music away.

"I'll get these to her. No sweat," Sully promised. "We have track tomorrow bright and early." With Sumia's mellophone in one hand and her own baritone in the other, Sully faced Robin. The redhead leaned in enough that Robin could see the definition in her-mildly intimidating-muscles. "I know she's a klutz, but Sumia's a good kid. You make her cry, I make you cry." Something about Sully's statement made Robin antsy, and it wasn't the veiled threat of violence. Ignoring Robert's queries about the brunette, Robin picked conversation topics far from music for their walk home.

It was too early for conversation, and as Robert lectured on, his voice was little more than a buzz.

A rather annoying buzz. "You know, we don't ever judge your life choices. Why did we give that a try today?" She bent outside her locker, fiddling with the lock yet again. Robert stood at her side, a disapproving frown clouding his usually cheery features. "I think they gave me the locker from Hell," Robin added darkly. While scowling at the door did nothing to help it open, it did leave Robin a feeling of satisfaction.

"Well, I think you should talk to Mom. Believe it or not, she didn't pull you out of that music academy to spite you and—"

"You've told me this a good twenty times now, Robert." Aware her voice was rising and that the boy who perpetually lurked near her locker was waiting for gossip, Robin dragged her brother further down the hall. She quieted down to a whisper. "Blah, blah, blah, Mom loves you very much, and blah, blah, blah, by the way, Dad was a jerk, and you just didn't notice because you weren't home last year. While we're on the topic, the divorce will work out better for everyone anyways," she hissed. Robert watched the floor with hooded eyes. "I miss anything? Anything else you want to make sure the guy next to my locker can eavesdrop on?"

"Only the bit where you should stop lashing out at everything in sight," he retorted. Robert glared at Robin's locker loiterer. "There's no band after class today, but I have to stay after for chess. Do whatever you want." Stalking off, Robert threw Robin a sulky wave.

"I'm playing piano after class. Screw you, too, Robert," she called after him. Perhaps she was being childish, and perhaps she didn't really care.

The school day felt like an eternity. In his endless carefree mood, Stahl had first jabbered on through ten minutes of biology and then slept through the other hour and some change, earning himself detention from a rather frosty Ms. Miriel. Naturally, today was also the day Robin recognized Sumia in her English class. As it dawned on Robin just who the brunette in the front of the class was, she cursed her luck silently. Noting Sumia's unusual proficiency in literature, Robin kept her head down for the rest of class. Last thing she needed was a potentially bitter girl to deal with. The hours dragged on. When the bell finally rang at the end of fourth, Robin leapt out of her seat and tore to the music room.

At last, the music room was empty. Tossing her bag to the side, Robin pulled out the piano stool and sat there. It was nostalgic, comforting. Even a week was a long time to go without touching the delicate keys. Gingerly, Robin lifted the piano cover and ran her fingers across the ivories. With a contented sigh, Robin began to run through some scales and then the piece she had been working on before she left Plegian Music Academy, a Schumann piano concerto. There was just something so soothing in the piano. For all her mother's worries, Robin could never see how Dad pushing her to work even harder at it was unhealthy. A sudden crash startled the girl from her concentration.

"I- Oooo, sorry," Sumia sat up from her face plant on the floor, rubbing her forehead. Scrambling to collect her bag and mellophone case, the brunette grimaced. "It was just so pretty sounding, I forgot to pay attention to everything else. Sorry. I'm a bumbling buffoon," Sumia mumbled.

A large red welt was beginning to grow on the brunette's forehead, and Robin felt irrationally guilty. Sumia wasn't that distracted over yesterday, right? "I... It's not your fault. I probably shouldn't have left my backpack in the middle of the floor." While gathering up her bookbag, Robin hesitated. After reprimanding Sumia the other day, Robin was unsure where she stood with the girl. Not that it mattered anyways, she reminded herself. Her goal was to improve as a musician, and she couldn't do that if she had to waste her time with Robert's band. "You know we don't have practice today, right? You can go do whatever you do in your free time today," Robin said.

"I know that." Sumia pulled out a chair and a stand. "Can I practice in here, or would you rather I practice in the hall?" Sumia frowned, but with determination. Robin felt something in her soften.

With a little shrug, the girl returned to the piano. "You don't make small talk, right? If I won't distract you, you won't distract me."

"You're in a good mood this morning," Stahl chirped, offering Robin half a blueberry muffin. "Your weekend was especially charming, I take it?"

"Shut it," she grumbled. "And take your muffin elsewhere." Robert was ignoring her. Robin may have avoided her mother all weekend, and Robert may have been slightly bitter about it. Not that it mattered, because it didn't, but the quiet on the walk to school left Robin nothing to do but wallow in her own thoughts. That inevitably led to Sumia, who was starting to make Robin feel slightly guilty. The brunette had practiced in the music room as Robin practiced both Thursday and Friday for a few hours, and her dedication to the mellophone was starting to become undeniable. Meaning Robin may have judged her a little hastily.

"You owe me for the half a bagel I gave you last week. Now you have to take half of this muffin," Stahl replied sweetly. Robin, absorbed in her own thoughts, snapped her eyes to him with a glare. He placed the muffin on Robin's notebook. Moist crumbs now peppered the cover.

"That doesn't even make sense. I'm not eating this." Robin crossed her arms and scowled at the olive haired boy. "You know, I had rather optimistically assumed the one good thing to come from this weekend would be the waning of your interest in me." Yet here he sat, Robin puzzled, messy hair, messy t-shirt, messy bag, distinctly ordinary, but willing to put up with her crap.

"So your weekend was crummy," Stahl exclaimed triumphantly. Rolling her eyes, Robin let out the start of a breathy laugh before clamping her mouth shut. Stahl looked delighted at the result.

Robin popped a piece of muffin in her mouth. "I was about to apologize for my rudeness a moment ago, but I think I retract my unspoken apology."

However, it was much too late, and Stahl was already grinning. "I'll learn to read you yet, Robin. I may be ordinary in everything else, but I do understand people."

Chewing on the muffin, Robin scratched at the table with her pen. "What do you think of Sumia, then?" At Stahl's curious gaze, Robin hastily amended her statement. "As a friend, or rather as a musician, perhaps? For purely professional reasons of course."

"Oh, of course." The boy ruffled a hand through his hair. "Well, she's got determination, that's for sure. I think Sumia wants to do well. Just give her a sec to catch up with the rest of us." Ms. Miriel took her position at the front of the room, and Robin's and Stahl's conversation quieted. As Ms. Miriel started the lecture, Stahl leaned over and whispered, "If you're worried about your people skills, slow down and just observe now and then." Robin flinched at his words, warm against her ear. People didn't get close to her. Ever. Oblivious, Stahl looked back to the chalk board.

When Robin walked into the music room, Sully and Chrom were hovering over Sumia, coaching her on various musical things. Shooting Robin a warning look, Sully meandered to her seat between Stahl and Frederick. Chrom sat down behind Sumia and continued to instruct the girl quietly. As Robin took her place, Robert ceased his conversation with Lissa to study the the wall somewhere beyond Robin's shoulder. Yep. Not upset about her ignoring Mother at all. More heartening, Robin could hear massive improvement in Sumia's musical technique from a weekend

of practice.

While Robin packed up her scores after class, she could sense Sumia and Chrom hovering nearby. If they were trying to be discrete, it wasn't working. Robin could feel Sumia's eager gaze burning holes into her side, and Chrom's continuous fidgeting kept distracting her organizing. "Yes?"

Sumia backed into Chrom with a squeak. "I-I-I-"

"Hey." Steadying the girl with his hands on her shoulders, Chrom gave her a quick smile. "You had something you wanted to ask, right?"

Sumia looked to him with a light flush. Young love. Great. Rolling her eyes, Robin returned to her scores. Well, they suited each other at least. Together they looked like a pair of magazine models. If the male model came with an extreme abhorrence for sleeves. Packing the last of the scores into her bag, Robin settled it on her back. "Well. I'm done here, so-"

"Wait." Twiddling with the sleeve of today's cardigan-buttery yellow-, Sumia stumbled forward. "I-I... I wanted to ask you... if it wasn't too much trouble... how I was doing? Maybe?"

"You've improved quite quickly," Robin remarked. Sumia brightened instantly, lighting up her entire face and bringing a radiant color to her cheeks. Robin could feel herself flustering for the girl. It was such a simple statement, but the brunette was treating it like the highest praise. "I'm just being honest so... don't..." Unsure what Sumia was even doing exactly, Robin waved her hands around.

With a little giggle, Sumia nodded. "Right. I'm going to try real hard. Just wait and see! Soon I won't be the one to pull everyone down."

Chrom smiled after her as Sumia skipped away. "You need something, too? Can I actually leave now?"

"It's good that you're helping Sumia," he said. "I know the band is a little rough now, but even your presence inspires everyone. If you and I do a good job leading them, I think everything will shape up well." Chrom's blind faith in in the band, them, her, shown in his eyes. The puppy dog look was oddly charming with his masculine features. Of course, Chrom didn't know Robin was only here for the piano. Suddenly rather uncomfortable, Robin wanted nothing more than to be somewhere else.

Thursday afternoon, Robin walked in on Sumia practicing. At the click of the door closing, Sumia looked up with a grin. "If I won't distract you, you won't distract me, right?" she chirped, flashing another finger-wiggling wave. "No small talk."

Robin spared the brunette a glance. That was a mistake. Sumia's face was filled with the same belief as Chrom's, two parts expectation, one part hope. Also known as instant guilt cocktail. A little support... that wouldn't hurt, right? Robert would never even need to know. "Actually, I was thinking I would distract you today." At Sumia's confused expression, Robin added, "Productive distraction. Like as in I'll give you lessons." Robin placed her seat next to Sumia's and studied over the girl's music. "Look. Just... I can play trumpet, okay? Which is close fingering-wise, so it's not that ridiculous for me to offer. Besides, if I help you now, I don't have to waste time in band on it later." She could feel Sumia's smile. "Don't-don't do that. Stop grinning. I'm forcing you to accept my assistance. You should be finding this a hindrance. Now, what are you doing?"

"Well," Sumia shuffled through some music. "Chrom gave me this…"

It wasn't until the Robin looked up from the stand and noticed the band room was unusually orange, that she realized she and Sumia had been practicing for hours. "That's enough." Flinching, Sumia lowered her mellophone. "Nothing's wrong," Robin said. "But if I don't leave now, I'll be late for dinner. Robert'll kill me when I get home late, and Mother will again when she gets back from work." Sumia's smile wrinkled her nose into a button. "It... sounded good. Today. Your playing."

"Thanks."

They packed away their things in silence. A silence that could probably be described as comfortable, if Robin didn't have an overpowering urge to say something. Anything. "So how long have you and Chrom been dating?"

Sumia scattered the music she was collecting. "Eeeeeeh?"

"Oh, gods. You're not?" Robin wished nothing more than to melt into the floor. This was what happened when you broke your own rule on small talk. Her face was burning, and Sumia was gaping at her, sheet music lying forgotten on the floor. "You're not. Well. I… You talk about him an awful lot." Robin began to collect some of Sumia's papers. "And you two had a bit of the power couple vibe going on yesterday." Staring at Sumia's now empty music stand, Robin shoved the music she collected in a fist at the brunette. Feeling irrationally defensive, she added, "It's only natural people would misunderstand."

Gently, Sumia pried the music from Robin's grasp. "Well, you weren't too far off." Sumia's face flushed. "You just may have been off about the part where I loved him, is all." The girls began putting away their chairs and music stand. "I admire him."

"There's a difference?"

Sumia frowned at her. "Of course. Anyways, he's always so confident, and athletic, and smart, and charismatic—"

"Doesn't seem too smart or charismatic to me," Robin added, recalling his bumbling comments to her on athleticism a week ago. Heaving her bag over her shoulder, Robin meandered towards the door.

Sumia frowned again. Gathering together her instrument and cutesy, floral messenger bag, Sumia followed after Robin. "Well… he is. Everyone admires him, not just me. Anyways, Sully told me Chrom was starting this pep band, and he was looking for members. And I guess part of me just hoped if I was near him, somehow… I…" Sumia closed her eyes and sighed. The two girls made their way down the stairs to the main lobby. "Ohhh, I don't even know now," Sumia wailed, her voice echoing in the staircase.

"That sounds…" Robin was at a loss for words, torn between being blunt or attempting some sort of understanding.

"See, you don't get it. You're smart and pretty and really good at music and you can play five bajillion instruments—"

"I'm crummy at people," Robin declared. Sumia fell silent, but Robin was sure she saw the girl's lips turn up a little. "You just witnessed how poor my people skills are. In fact, you've been victim to my people skills a few times now. So..." Robin chewed on her lip and quickly added, "Anyways, you don't need to be like Chrom. For one, I think if nothing else your work ethic is admirable."

"Thanks."

The two girls stood outside the school. Feeling the compelled to both leave and stay, Robin abruptly began to stride down the first few steps. With yet another finger-wiggly wave, Sumia called after her, "See you in English tomorrow?"

"Ahhhh..." It wouldn't be too bad, having one acquaintance, right? Robin could have one without betraying her loyalty to Plegian. "Yeah. I guess so." Sumia broke into another dazzling smile.

The next morning, Robert broke the twin's silence with a light, "Chrom told me you've been helping Sumia."

"Mmhmm." Was it odd to miss Robert's prying? Because a little part of her did, somehow.

"How's that going?" His voice was filled with poorly faked nonchalance, and Robin resisted the urge to grin.

Tall, Dark, and Handsome

After practice on Monday, Chrom approached Robin as the rest of the band packed up. "How do we sound?" he asked, leaning on the conductor's stand Robin had yet to put away.

Folding her arms across her chest, Robin thought for a moment. "Well, we have improved over the past two weeks." Sumia, in particular, she added mentally. The brunette had put in a lot of effort and her sound quality and technique reflected that. As Sumia waved to Robin on her way out, Robin nodded at the girl. Looking back to Chrom, she found him watching Sumia leave. "Is there something in particular you're looking for?"

Collecting up Robin's scores for her, Chrom held them out to the girl. "I was thinking we should play for the women's soccer team next Friday," he answered, all steel and optimism.

"And I was thinking we should really turn this thing Survivor style and vote a musician off the island each week. Good thing I didn't suggest that," she replied. Ignoring her comment, Chrom lifted Robin's backpack over his shoulder and slowly made his way towards the door. "Hey! Give me my bag!"

"I was going to, but this thing weighs like a sack of rocks. I can't let a girl carry that." Robin's subsequent eye roll was ineffective on Chrom's back. "Anyways, you said we sounded better." Chrom held the door for Robin and for Robert, who trailed after the pair, chatting animatedly with Lissa. "I was thinking we should start performing."

Robin chewed on her lip. It wasn't that the band sounded bad. In fact for a group of hobbyists, their technique and sound quality was decent. "It's more an issue of numbers than skill." Robin waited for Chrom's objection, but he seemed to be waiting for her elaboration. "Our instrumentation is unbalanced. With three baritones and the tuba, every week I have to struggle with quieting them down, while coaxing the woodwinds to play louder."

"I'm playing really loudly," Lissa piped up suddenly, "Just ask Maribelle."

Glancing over her shoulder, Robin caught the similarities between Lissa and her brother's determined faces. "I never said you weren't." She turned back towards Chrom, still carrying both their bags, his light jacket slung over one shoulder. "Anyways, first there's that. We could really use more woodwinds. Specifically, though, there are parts we haven't even covered yet. I don't feel comfortable playing publicly until we at least get a saxophone player, preferably a larger percussion section, too."

The four of them had reached the door. Robert and Lissa were watching Robin and Chrom, waiting. Shrugging Robin's bag off his shoulder, Chrom returned it to the girl. She grabbed it and as Chrom released his hold almost fell forward with the sudden weight. Eying Chrom's toned arms enviously, Robin adjusted the backpack on her shoulders. "If I find a saxophone player," Chrom locked eyes with Robin, "will you conduct us next Friday?"

There was contention in his voice. Robin was aware of it and ignored the knowledge he was egging her on. "If he's good, fine." At Chrom's victorious grin, Robin added, "But he had better be good, and my standards are going to be high."

"I trust you to judge fairly," Chrom replied, making his way with Lissa down the steps. "Of course, I also trust you'll be ready to conduct us next Friday." With a lazy wave and a cocky smile, Chrom rounded a corner, Lissa skipping behind him.

Before practice the next day, Robin found Chrom once again leaning against her stand, this time with a dark-haired boy in tow. Eying the boy's instrument case, Robin quirked an eyebrow at Chrom. "He any good?"

Chrom nodded at the student, who seemed intent on looking anywhere but at Robin. "Well, Lon'qu, you tell her," Chrom ordered.

"… I'm good," Lon'qu told Robin's feet, in a deep voice. Before Robin could address his irritating lack of eye contact, Lon'qu wandered off to find a chair and stand. Chrom's lips twitched.

"I'm Robin. Nice to meet you, too," she called after him, before turning to Chrom. "Laugh and you're dead," Robin snarled. Chrom made his way to his seat without a comment, lips still twitching suspiciously. With a chair and stand, Lon'qu began to set his instrument up near Vaike. Before the boy could finish, Robin halted him. "Hang on, saxo—Lon'qu. I want you up here." The boy froze. Robin contemplated her set up for a moment. "If we were larger, I'd put you behind the flutes," Robin mumbled more to herself than to the band, "But since we aren't, just sit at the beginning of the first row, next to Lissa." Vaike mouthed something at Lon'qu, who remained still at his side.

"…Fine." The boy muttered. With a smile, Lissa bounced up and waved at Lon'qu, who ignored her in his contemplation of the floor. Maneuvering through the band, Lon'qu placed his stand several feet away from Lissa. Robin could barely see the boy in her peripherals.

"You're going to have to sit closer to her than that," Robin ordered. "In fact, you should be sitting opposite Sumia." Sumia gave her finger-wiggly wave, as Lon'qu inched towards Lissa. Robin shot Chrom another glare, but the boy just shrugged. Finally, Lon'qu was in line with Sumia. Or his stand was, at least. The boy himself was so far over in his seat from Lissa that he was still out of line. Fed up with the matter, Robin decided not to press it.

Fortunately, Lon'qu was good, as he and Chrom had claimed. At the end of practice, Robin came up to the boy. "Here's the rest of the music we're planning on playing. Get comfortable with it," she told him. "It seems," she continued with a scowl at Chrom, "we have a performance next Friday."

Lon'qu gingerly took the music from Robin. "Move my seat," he muttered, casting a glance at Lissa.

Robin frowned. "If this is a personal matter, I need a good reason," she murmered. With a darting look to Lissa, Robin was relieved to see her deep in conversation with Maribelle. The past few weeks with Sumia had contained a little more emotional nonsense than Robin wanted to handle again. "If you really need to move, move next to Sumia." Robin hesitated. "Should we talk about this outside?"

"…No." Robin rolled her eyes. Sumia, Robert, and now Lon'qu… these people had no sense of privacy. "I…" Lon'qu smoothed his hands on his jeans. His eyes darted everywhere except to Robin. "I have a problem." His voice lowered, and Robin leaned closer to the boy, ignoring his cringe. "With women," he hissed.

Despite Robin's protests, Robert dragged his sister with him to the tree the next morning. "There's cross-country practice in the morning. You only have to deal with Lissa and Maribelle today." Robert threw his sister an unusually haggard glance, as he pushed open the door to the courtyard. "Lissa, really, she's—"

"Lon'qu hates me!" Lissa's wail attracted a few glances, but ignoring them, the girl bounced up to

the twins. "Robert wouldn't say it last night, but I know it's true," she exclaimed with a pout. "Robiiiiiiiin, you would tell me if Lon'qu told you he hates me, right?"

Robin turned to her brother, only to find him retreating to Maribelle. The two looked a little desperate. "I could probably count the number of words Lon'qu has spoken to me on my fingers," she replied. His words were already a minor source of irritation. Rather than finishing off her AP Euro homework last night, Robin found herself debating whether or not to adjust the boy's seating. Said homework now had to be finished during lunch.

"And I bet two of those were…" Lissa paused, before screwing up her face and imitating Lon'qu's voice. "Lissa sucks… or something like that, right?" Before Robin could answer, Lissa pointed an accusing finger at Robin. "I know he asked for you to change his seat."

Yeah, Robin thought, he insisted on whispering right next to you. "Then you also heard him mention his issue with women," Robin pointed out.

"He probably meant me, specifically. No, he definitely meant me specifically." Lissa thought for a moment. "Are you going to change his seat?"

"I... No. At least, not unless you have an issue with it, too." The gym doors opened as Lissa formulated her reply. The two girls watched the cross country runners pour out. Chrom, Vaike, and Sully in animated conversation made their way to the tree, and Lissa pulled Robin to the tree as well.

"Lon'qu. Go."

Stahl thought for a moment, eyes to the ceiling, one hand to his chin in a grand thinking gesture. Today Robin had brought a doughnut to split with the boy. She picked at it slowly. "I should have known this delicious pastry held ulterior motives," he replied forlornly, taking a bite of the chocolate doughnut.

"Whatever. I owed you."

"Fortunately for you, I am a simple man and easily bribed. I have English with Lon'qu," Stahl said.

Robin raised an eyebrow. "An eloquent speaker, that one..."

Stahl chuckled. "He's… he doesn't mince words. Anyways, he seems dependable, hardworking, dedicated. He's just terrified of girls."

Robin sighed. Lon'qu was a good musician, a very good musician, in fact, better than most of the other players. "With his seating mess, he's giving me a headache, is what he's doing," Robin groaned, flopping on the desk. Quickly finishing off the doughnut as Ms. Miriel entered the room, Stahl gave the girl a curious expression before flipping open his notes.

As Robin walked into band practice, she yet again found Chrom leaning on her stand, Lon'qu hovering behind him. Dumping her bag on the ground, she looked to Chrom in resignation. "You want to tell them about our performance next Friday, or should I?"

"Actually, I need you to do something else first." Chrom glanced over his shoulder. "You, too, Lon'qu." Robin sighed as Lon'qu did. Flicking his eyes to hers, Lon'qu quickly looked away. "A small amount of paper work needs to be processed with our faculty advisor before you guys are officially members."

Robin scrunched her face up in exasperation. "This is practice. Can't it wait?" Lon'qu seemed to agree with her. Maybe.

"All you need to do is walk to the faculty room down the hall and fill out a form for the advisor. It's easy. While you guys are doing that, I'll tell everyone about next Friday." Before Robin could object further, Chrom started guiding Robin and Lon'qu out of the room. "Just ask for Gregor. Word of warning," he added, pushing the pair out the door, "he's foreign."

Outside the music room, Robin chewed on her lip for a moment while Lon'qu stared down the floor. "Checking for booby-traps or something? C'mon, let's go." Robin strode down the hall. Irked to find Lon'qu was not following after her, Robin spun on her heel. "What?"

"The faculty room is this way," Lon'qu replied, pointing down the opposite end of the hall. As Lon'qu trod in the right direction, Robin, with a blush and a scowl, caught up with him.

"I knew that," she declared.

"Heh. Not as smart as you want to appear, eh?" Several feet away from the boy, Robin barely heard him. In fact, she was slightly suspicious she had misheard him as, first, it sounded like he laughed and, second, he may have just teased her. However, Robin was unsure how to reply, and the two walked in silence.

When the pair entered the faculty room, a lone man was seated in one of the many squishy chairs, some sort of grading in hand. "Gregor, right?" Robin asked. Lon'qu hovered somewhere behind her.

The older man looked up from his work, glancing at the two before half-smiling. "Oho, Gregor is seeing Lon'qu with pretty girl for fencing, yes?" He hopped out of his chair with agility unusual for his large build.

"No," Lon'qu deadpanned, but Gregor was already inspecting Robin closely.

"Is skinny. But Lucina is being skinny and very good at fencing, so maybe girl is good," Gregor declared, circling Robin slowly.

Feeling like some prize animal, Robin threw the older man a glare. Either oblivious or uncaring, he continued his study. "Actually, I'm not here to join the fencing club, so—"

"Gregor teach no fencing club. Is fencing team, very good, very competitive." Gregor folded his arms across his chest. "Girl could be joining fencing team if very good."

"She's not," Lon'qu supplied.

While true, from Lon'qu's mouth this felt inexplicably offensive. However, Gregor began again before Robin could object. "Oi! Then why Lon'qu bring pretty girl here? Gregor is thinking he need team manager. Will girl make good team manager?"

"…Maybe," Lon'qu answered again. Gregor appeared mildly irritated, but for one so verbally expressive, his body language was more guarded. Caught in a conversation between two unreadable faces, Robin chewed her lip in irritation.

"Hey! I'm right here, you know," Robin piped up, elbowing her way in front of Lon'qu, who had somehow snuck in between Robin and the advisor. "Don't go holding this conversation without me. And—"

"Ohohoho, girl has spirit. Gregor like this one." Gregor looked from Lon'qu to Robin, half-grin returning. "How would pretty girl like to be being team manager for fencing? Girl be getting the water and the jerseys and helping setting the matches and doing more, of course."

"I'm not interested."

"Pretty girl sure? Lon'qu is good boy. Is easy on eyes, too." Somewhere behind her, Robin heard a suspiciously panicked shuffling but stood her ground between Lon'qu and Gregor. "Many girl probably be trying—"

"That's enough," Lon'qu barked, pushing Robin out of the way. His face was slightly pink, whether from Gregor's words or female contact, Robin was unsure. "God, I just touched your arm." Lon'qu stared at his hand in mild disgust.

"I'm probably bruising," Robin added, partly out of sarcasm, partly out of bitterness to Lon'qu's reaction, as she rubbed the arm in question. "Anyways." The girl turned back to Gregor's now very amused face. "We're here to join the pep band. There's some paperwork to fill out that you have."

"Well, pretty girl just be keeping in mind Gregor's words. Fencing is only happening on Wednesday nights." Gregor shuffled through some binders on a nearby bookcase. Handing a few of the papers to the pair, he added, "Lon'qu good at fencing. Also is tall, dark, and handsome. Ladies be liking these things, yes?" Robin quickly ducked her head down to start her paperwork, but not before noting Lon'qu's even redder face.

Leaving the faculty office an official pep band member, Robin flopped against one of the lockers. Lon'qu looked almost sympathetic. "That took longer than I thought," Robin moaned. "Let's get back to practice while there's still some time." Straightening up, she started back towards the band room. Lon'qu trailed after her.

"Are you actually bruising?" he asked abruptly, halfway between the two rooms.

"Huh?" It took Robin a second to remember what Lon'qu was referring to. "Oh, I was just kidding. I can check if you want though." Pushing up her short sleeve, Robin raised her eyebrows. Her upper arm was slightly purple in a few places, one for each of his fingers. "Huh. You have a vice-like grip."

"Sorry," Lon'qu muttered. "For, Gregor, too."

Robin rolled her eyes. "I can accept that if it makes you feel better, but neither of those are your fault." They had reached the door, and Robin's words hung there awkwardly.

Reentering the music room, Robin found Robert conducting the band. At the sound of the door closing, Robert turned to the two of them. "They're all yours, sister dearest," he sang, bowing to her and taking a seat. Quirking an eyebrow at her brother, Robin reclaimed her stand. Lon'qu took his seat next to Lissa, who gave him a light smile. Picking up where Robert left off, Robin resumed practice.

"Sooooo, tall, dark, and handsome, eh?" Sumia giggled, as Lon'qu left the music room.

"I'll have you know those were just given as three valid reasons to become fencing team manager," Robin replied dryly. Sumia helped the girl collect up her music scores, while Robert chatted with Chrom and Lissa. "You a member of his fan club, too?"

"Too?"

"Not as in 'in addition to me', more like 'in addition to others that don't include me'." Robin zipped up her backpack. "Why are we even talking about this?"

"All the other girls are. Even some of the guys," Sumia replied blithely. "I was just thinking we should get our requisite girl talk in."

The door opened, and Lon'qu reentered. "Well shut your requisite girl talk, then," Robin hissed, hoisting her bag over her shoulder. Lon'qu looked around the room, before starting towards his seat.

"I left my bag," he declared to the floor. Giving Lissa a wide berth, Lon'qu maneuvered around the now silent trio. At the girl's frown, Robin sighed internally. While the two had no necessity to get along, she had no wish to be confronted by a distressed Lissa again. Head down, Lon'qu snatched his bag off the ground. Something about his attempt to ignore everyone in the room irritated the girl.

"Not as smart as you wish to appear, eh?" Robin blurted it out without thinking. Mortified, she shut her mouth quickly. The remaining students stared at her in some mixture of shock and amusement, but Lon'qu's expression was unreadable.

"Heh." Nodding to Robin, Lon'qu made his way to the door. Sumia let out a very audible sigh of relief, as Chrom and Robert returned to their conversation. Lissa seemed to be contemplating something.

"Lon'qu, wait!" The boy halted, hand on the doorknob. Lissa fidgeted with the strap of her bag, rocking on her feet from heel to toe. "Ahhaha… bye?" she squeaked.

"…Bye."

As soon as the Lon'qu left, Lissa fist pumped gleefully. The girl giggled as Robert and Chrom watched her antics with amusement. Wiggling her eyebrows at Robin, Sumia whispered, "I'd move fast. It looks like..." She paused before continuing with added flair "…drama." Thinking for a moment, Sumia added, "Girls talk about that too, right? Boys, drama… and something else. Other boys, maybe?"

"Shoes. I think the last one might be shoes."

"Mmmm, I do love—"

"Food? Are we talking about food?" Stahl piped up from somewhere behind Robin. The girl spun around, heart beating rather quickly, as Sumia wiggled her fingers at the Stahl. With a hand tangled in his olive hair, he looked down at Robin. "I am a rather big fan of pies, in case… you know," Stahl said hopefully.

"No, I don't. You nearly gave me a heart attack with your shouting. Go away," Robin snapped at Stahl's bemused face.

The boy put his hands up in surrender, inching back towards a scruffy backpack. "I just need to get my bag," Stahl said, as he slowly bent down to pick up his battered bookbag.

"Don't you dare," Robin hissed to Sumia, who looked like she was contemplating eyebrow wiggling once again. Adjusting her own bag on her shoulders, Robin turned back to the door. "Well, let's get out of here," she called to the remaining band members. The six musicians meandered out of the school, absorbed in friendly conversation.

The Sweetheart

Chewing on her lip, Robin pulled Robert aside before practice on Monday. "I…" Robert smiled lightly with a mixture of encouragement and confusion. "It's like this…" Maribelle skirted around the pair delicately, eyebrow raised in polite disdain. Robin and her brother were close to completely blocking the band room doorway, and Lissa and Chrom were watching them curiously. "Let's talk about this outside." She turned to the door and found herself facing Gregor, rather than an empty doorway. Turning back around, Robin scowled. "Later," she hissed to her brother.

"Gregor is hearing the whispering and seeing the frowning," the middle-aged man boomed. "Is very sad girl not happy to see Gregor. Gregor come with gift." At Robin's pursed lips, Gregor dragged an orange haired boy from the hall to the music room. "He skips Gregor's class too many times, so Gregor gives him choice." The boy surveyed the room with an air of self-assurance, before unwrapping a lollypop with a twirl and popping in his mouth. "Boy can be fencing or be playing little music thing. Boy pick fencing. Very bad at the fencing." Noting Robin's scowl in his direction, the boy flashed a wink and a smirk. Ignoring the warmth of her face, Robin deepened her frown. "So now boy make music." Gregor pushed the boy forward with a grimace. "Be telling Gregor if boy skip this, too. Gregor is going now."

With a half-hearted wave, Robin watched Gregor leave the band room before turning on her new band member. "Can I go now?" he drawled, edging back towards the door.

"No, you can't," Robin replied. She folded her arms over her chest and studied the boy. "Quit looking around so shiftily. It's irritating." The boy shrugged and stared lazily at Robin instead. Glancing back at the band, Robin frowned at Chrom's shrug. As she turned back to the boy, Robin found him closer to the door than before. Grabbing his arm, Robin pulled the boy to the rest of the band. He scowled, but Robin ignored it. "This is our newest member. His name is…"

"Gaius," the orange-haired boy muttered. Lissa beamed at the new boy, and Maribelle leaned over to mouth something to the blonde that looked suspiciously like 'delinquent.' Whatever it was, Lissa's eyes shone with fascination. Sumia shot him one of her finger-wiggly waves, but Gaius seemed not to notice.

"And he plays the…"

"I have been told I play a mean recorder." One or two people giggled, as Robin shot Gaius a frosty glare. The boy shrugged at her, twirling his lollypop yet again. Crossing her arms, Robin resisted the urge to pluck the candy from his fingers. "Can I go now?"

"No," she hissed. Pointing to the back of the band, she said, "I need more drum line. Vaike, wave." The blonde gave Gaius a wave and a grin. "You can join him in the back, playing bass drum."

"Charming suggestion…" Gaius twisted around Robin, "But I think—"

Once again snagging his arm, Robin kept Gaius where he was. "The bass drums are the other way." Gaius scowled but freeing his arm from Robin's hold, sauntered to the back. With the deftness of someone accustomed to the instrument, he quickly set up one of the drums and a music stand.

Turning to face the girl, Gaius tossed her another sly wink. "Don't I just live to serve, Bubbles?"

"I'm Robin. Pleased to meet you," she added drily, passing the bass drum music through the band.

"Most people are, Bubbles." Gaius looked up from his music, with the smirk Robin itched to smack off his face. Shooting glares at all of the gigglers, Robin began band practice.

Gaius had played some percussion before. He sight-read the music and fit in with the band with ease. His personality was another matter. "Bye, Bubbles," he purred at her, spinning his lollypop in one hand, other arm resting on her stand. "Don't cry too much in my absence." Robin yanked her music scores out from under his arm, and Gaius's grin only broadened into something more cat-like. Sticking his lollypop back in his mouth and his hands in pockets, the boy meandered out the door.

Twisting around, Robin sighed at Sumia. "Do you know him? Is he always this much of an ass?"

"Ehh?" Sumia dropped the messenger bag she had just picked up. Raising her eyebrows, Robin watched Sumia fumble for her bag. Blushing, Sumia laughed nervously. "I… uhhh… wouldn't know." The brunette scrambled around Robin, who stuffed her music in her backpack and followed after her.

"If you have blackmail information on Gaius, as your band director you're obligated to share it with me," Robin declared. Sumia's shoulders were inching up towards her reddening ears, and the girl walked even faster. "Don't tell me you fancy—"

Sumia spun around suddenly. "I pushed him down the stairs," she wailed.

"In a murderous—"

"It wasn't in a murderous rage," Sumia answered. She began walking at a slower pace. "We have the same fourth period, and we were walking out one day. He was a little bit in front of me, I tripped on my laces in front of the school, and we both fell down the steps." Sumia sighed. "Except it wasn't like in books where it becomes one of those awesome bonding moments... Gaius hasn't looked me in the face since."

"Maybe I should push him down some stairs, too."

Sumia buried her face in her hands. "Ooooo… I'm such a klutz. Stupid Sumia. Dumb Sumia. Silly, clumsy—"

"Oi! Cut that out." Robin forced Sumia into eye contact, and the brunette quieted down. "If Gaius isn't man enough to look you in the face after you nearly killed him…" Sumia grimaced. "Sorry. Took a tumble with him… God, that's worse." Now blushing, teary-eyed, and generally mortified looking, Sumia sniffled miserably. "Well, whatever. If you want to talk to that annoying orange-haired brat, you should go up and talk to him. Screw what he thinks." With a watery nod, Sumia brightened up. One finger-wiggly wave later, the brunette was off in the direction of her home.

Robert, who had been silently trailing after the pair, jogged up to Robin. "So, you wanted to ask me something?" Silently thanking her brother's tact in not mentioning Sumia, Robin nodded. Robert grinned. "And?"

Robin strode ahead of her brother. "I… We didn't have sports teams at Plegian." While she couldn't see Robert's face, Robin supposed it was still stuck in one of his goofy grins. "Which you know so…"

"You need my help," he piped up suddenly. "If you didn't have sports teams, then you didn't have pep bands, so you have no idea what you're doing, which irritates -."

"Enough." Robin chewed on her lip, making a note to bring ChapStick to class tomorrow. "Just tell me what I'm supposed to do on Friday."

On Tuesday, Robin's locker eavesdropper was gone. Instead, Gaius was sprawled on the floor outside Robin's locker, a donut in hand. Finishing the donut with ladylike delicacy, the boy looked up at Robin. "You're on my locker. I need to get to that." Robin folded her arms and glared.

Gaius remained where he was. "From what I hear, you can't even open it." With a lazy, feline stretch, Gaius stood up. He was taller than Robin and much too close to her. Pride, however, kept her in her place. Now it was a battle, and Robin didn't lose. "If you ask nice, I could open it for you." Unpeeling a candy, Gaius raised an eyebrow as he crinkled the wrapper.

Quicker than usual, Robin snatched the candy from the boy's fingers. Shiny, pink and artificial, the sweet seemed important to him, and Gaius's face fell immediately. Smiling at Gaius's glare, Robin resisted the urge to stick her tongue at him. "It's too early for candy, I'm doing you a favor." Eyes cast down to the floor, Gaius began to pout, cocky exterior sliding off smoothly. "Why are you here?"

Scuffing the floor with one black sneaker, Gaius did not look up. "…Not telling."

A part of Robin, the part that won at all costs, was screaming at her to mention Sumia. Despite the girl's insistence that the incident between the two was accidental, Robin was sure Gaius was mortified. Even Sumia was embarrassed, and the girl tripped all the time. "You're behaving like a child." Gaius stuck his tongue out at her. The childish portion of her personality, the one Gaius insisted on dredging up, cursed not sticking her own tongue out at him earlier. Robin's competitive side whispered for a mention of Sumia. "God give me strength," Robin muttered. Close enough to hear her, Gaius resumed pouting. "If I return this hard candy to you…" Like a small puppy, Gaius perked up at once. Taken aback at his sudden enthusiasm, Robin faltered. "Er… If I return this hard candy to you, will you go?" Gaius nodded, and Robin placed the sweet back in his palm. Something stopped her from mentioning Gaius's fall down the stairs.

At once, the boy popped the candy in his mouth with a satisfied smile. "Hard bargainer there, Bubbles." Robin rolled her eyes. "Don't pretend your heart doesn't flutter at my witty nickname."

"I don't have to pretend anything. Weren't you going?" Stuffing his hands in his pockets, Gaius strolled off. "I'll see you at practice this afternoon," Robin cried after him. It wasn't that she wanted him there. Rather, she didn't, but it seemed important that Gaius should be there.

"Wouldn't it be easier if I just didn't show up?" Gaius shouted in reply. It came out, the reason for his sudden desire to open her locker.

"You're my only bass drum."

As Robin dropped her bag next to her conductor's stand, Lissa bounded up to her. "Did Gaius help you with your locker?" Robin's eyes narrowed. A quick scan of the band room revealed Gaius wasn't here today. Oblivious, Lissa continued on. "He came up to me this morning asking for help getting along with you, so I told him he should try to help you with your locker. Did Robert mention he, Maribelle, and I tried to fix it last Thursday?" Whipping her gaze to her brother, Robin found him studying his music with uncharacteristic concentration. "Anyways, we couldn't fix it, so I thought if Gaius could, you'd be happy." Lissa's smile shone with good intentions. Before Robin could tell the girl to drop her good intentions down a well, the blonde began to chatter again. "He even called me princess." Lissa was practically sparkling, and she bounced excitedly. "For a delinquent, he's awfully nice."

"Hmph." Shuffling some music around, Lon'qu did not look up from his stand, but Robin was suspicious she heard something from him. Silently, she agreed. For a delinquent, Gaius was awfully scheming.

Twisting around, Lissa pouted at the boy. "Gaius is nice! You scared him away with all that glaring over my shoulder is all." Lissa flounced back to her seat and crossed her arms with a little scowl at Lon'qu. Their bonding was going well, Robin supposed. At any rate, Lon'qu sat fully in his seat, instead of on the far edge. Perhaps he could keep Lissa out of the trouble she was fishing for.

Robin shuffled some scores around on her stand. Gaius wasn't here yet, and neither was Sumia. Which was fine, she reminded herself. The band had to start practice soon, and the odds of Gaius and Sumia tripping down another staircase were low and thus unworthy of worry. Before she could start practice, however, Sumia barged into the band room, pulling Gaius along by the arm.

"Hey, Robin. Oooo, look, we just made it." Sumia was grinning with extreme enthusiasm. Gaius looked like he had eaten a few too many sweets. As Sumia closed the door behind them, Gaius tore off to the percussion section with unusual speed. "Would you believe Gaius didn't know where the band room is?" With an exaggerated shrug, Gaius shook his head. He looked anywhere but to Sumia, who smiled at him as she set up her space. While they brought a commotion with them, Robin hid her own smile at Sumia's brightened mood.

Wednesday was difficult. Robin's locker still would not open. At one point, Gaius trailed by, backpack-less, and offered to help. Despite her attempts to shoo him away, Gaius proceeded to sit next to her locker and toss candy wrappers at her cheek. In biology, Stahl got himself and Robin Thursday morning detention for talking in class. Perhaps an act of self-preservation after nineteen, not that she was counting, thrown candy wrappers, Gaius skipped practice. Band itself was stressful, even with the orange haired nuisance gone. As the last rehearsal before their performance, every mistake was more critical and every minute more precious. After quickly arranging a meeting time on Friday, Robin was relieved to see everyone go.

Although aware nothing could be done now, Robin spent most of Thursday panicking internally. When school let out at last, she rushed to the quiet relief of the piano. Per usual, Sumia was practicing mellophone at one end of the room. As Robin entered, the brunette shot her a characteristic wave before returning to her music. Dropping her backpack next to the piano stool, Robin ran through a few warm up exercises. Just as she was about to begin her new piece, an intruder wandered into the band room.

"Gaius?" Sumia exclaimed with poorly concealed delight at the boy's entrance. She placed her instrument down on its case and clasped her hands together.

Gaius froze in the doorway. His eyes darted around the room, and his lollypop twirled through his fingers even faster. "I… Uh. Crivens, wrong room." Slowly, the boy began retreating out of the music room. Good riddance, Robin supposed.

"Wait!" Shooting upward, Sumia followed after him. The brunette made it about two steps before stumbling over her music stand and face planting. "Ooooo…"

"Are you okay?" Robin and Gaius both shot each other the universal 'we both know we just said that, but neither of us will ever admit it' glance and shut their mouths. Rushing over, Robin knelt by Sumia, who sat up, bright red. Gaius hovered behind Robin for a moment before collecting up Sumia's music and righting her stand.

"I'm fine." Sumia bit her lip. Squatting down next to the two girls, Gaius handed the brunette her

music. He studied the wall instead of making eye contact with either of them, but the gesture cheered the girl up anyways. Taking her music from him, Sumia brushed off her shorts and tights and stood back up. "Sorry, I'm such a klutz. Umm… Gaius?" The boy seemed frozen again, lost in thought, embarrassment, or whatever it was that floated through his pesky brain. Briefly, Gaius glanced up at Sumia, who brightened, before averting his gaze. "You can stay and practice... If you want to, that is." Rather than responding, the boy wandered off to collect his instrument and music. Sumia, grinning, returned to her mellophone, and Robin, who had a strange urge to grin as well, scowled instead, before returning to her piano.

Friday afternoon, the energy in the band room buzzed. As the musicians collected their instruments, music, and the flip books and lyres required to play in the stands, Robin felt off kilter. "Relax, we'll do fine." Baritone in hand, Stahl smiled down at the girl.

"I know that," Robin objected. "Robert coached —I arranged everything last night." Folding her arms, Robin scowled at Stahl's chuckle.

"You don't have to know everything you know." Rather than reply, Robin stacked up some scores, more for comfort than for use. "You are allowed to rely on us a little," Stahl added warmly.

Robin watched Vaike punch Chrom's arm as the pair walked out with Sully and Sumia. The brunette waved at Robin, who waved back. With a newly polished baritone, Frederick hurried after them. "I know that," she mumbled. Maribelle and Lissa, deep in gossip, left next. Ricken trailed after Maribelle, for some reason juggling his equipment and her music. "Robert told me that last night." Robert and Virion, who Robin learned yesterday were in chess together, collected up some remaining music and wandered to the soccer field. Lon'qu had blended in with the crowd. Running late, Gaius scrambled out to the field last, hastily fixing his bass drum harness.

Acutely aware she and Stahl were the only ones left in the room, Robin found it easier to stare at his shirt, emblazoned with some sci-fi film she didn't recognize, than his face. "We should go, too."

"Eh? Crap, everyone left us." Stahl hurried to his bag and began pulling out his flip book, lyre, and stray sheet music. Now that there were more than a few feet between them, Robin watched Stahl rummage through his bag. Scrambling back up, Stahl smiled at the girl again and made his way to the door. Before Robin could react, Stahl ruffled her hair as he walked by. "Coming, Bubbles?"

"Can it." With an armful of scores preventing her from fixing her pale hair, Robin strode after him.

Blinking in the sunlight, Robin followed Stahl to the soccer fields. As the pair arrived, Chrom waved at them from the far corner of the home stands. "You missed my pep talk," he said "I seated the band. This good?" Chrom waved one sleeveless arm out to the band. They were small enough to take up two bleacher benches, with the percussion on the ground. Trapped between Sumia and Lissa, Lon'qu looked uncomfortable, but Robin ignored it. Stahl joined Frederick and Sully in the second row. At Robin's nod, Chrom took a place at Sully's side.

The stands were filling up slowly. A few people cast glances in their direction, and a few more, sitting behind the band, asked Chrom questions. Somehow, Robin noted, everyone knew him. Not a person walked by that had not waved to the boy or struck up a conversation with him. What he was doing here, in some start-up pep band, was still a mystery. "Looks like we're seat buddies, Bubbles." With yet another lollypop, Gaius leaned an elbow on Robin's shoulder.

"Unless you bought that candy here, I'm going to have to confiscate it. No outside food in the

stands." Robin stepped away from Gaius, and the boy stumbled at the loss of her shoulder.

"Hey, can I get everyone's attention, real quick?" Sumia waved her mellophone in the air, nearly catching Gaius in the head and cutting off his retort. The band turned towards the brunette. Gaius, with his mysterious fear of Sumia, watched the soccer players warm up on the field instead. "So, my good friend Cordelia, who most of you know…" As the rest of the band agreed, Robin felt a strong urge to contradict her. "She's team captain of the soccer team, which most of you also know, I guess." Sumia laughed nervously. "A-anyways, you're all staring at me, huh. I don't know how you do this, Chrom." The boy patted her on the shoulder. With slightly pinker cheeks and more nervous laughter, Sumia continued. "Cordelia's number is five, so everyone should cheer really loudly for her." The words tumbled out quickly, and Sumia quieted down equally quickly. Chrom patted the brunette's shoulder again, and she shot him a grin. As Sumia turned back to Robin, the girl found herself mouthing 'good job.' Sumia's grin widened.

Soccer turned out to be some long affair, involving a lot of running back and forth on the grass. During long periods of play or rest, Robin led the pep band in a song. After the first fifteen minutes, the girl was comfortable with the perfomance. Left with nothing to do but talk with her neighbors and watch the game, Robin stared aimlessly out at the soccer field. The ball got kicked out of bounds a lot, and Robin was glad the concrete stadium was a few feet off the ground. Best as Robin could tell, Sumia's friend Cordelia scored some points, and the crowd, not just the band, cried the red-head's name frequently. She was rather pretty, with long red hair and a gentle expression. Irrationally, Robin found herself turning Sumia's words over in her head. A good friend and a regular friend were different somehow, Robin supposed. Of course, she and Sumia were just acquaintances, so Robin probably didn't even rank in Sumia's hierarchy of friends, just like Sumia definitely didn't rank in hers.

Snapping out of her reverie, Robin tuned in to the sound of booing. The players had stopped kicking the ball and were clustered around one of their companions. Leaning over, Robert whispered to Robin. "Let everyone put their stuff down. Cordelia's been fouled." Robin gave everyone the at ease gesture, before turning back to the field. Sumia, she noted, was bouncing up and down, wringing her hands. As she leaned on the guardrails, Robin watched the referee flash a red card in the air. However, there were still too many players clustered around Cordelia to see what had happened.

Abruptly, the crowd around Cordelia cleared. The red-head attempted to stand up and quickly crumpled to the ground. "…Fractured ankle," Lon'qu muttered. Two of the coaches, or perhaps medics, ran on to the field with a stretcher. Despite Cordelia's attempts to stand, the men scooped her up and off the field.

"I'm going to talk to her," Sumia piped up. Shrugging away Chrom and Sully's hands, Sumia edged out of the stands. Before Robin could even curse the girl's clumsiness, the brunette was tumbling into the front row.

"Sumia!" Robin's voice sounded even higher in the stadium's silence.

"Crivens! Do you have a death wish, Stumbles?!" With a small grunt of pain, Gaius leaned up on one of his elbows, Sumia cradled in his other arm. Robin was thankful the instruments sat a few feet away from the pair. Not only would any one of them have been painful to land on, the instruments were rather delicate.

The brunette pushed herself off his chest, and Gaius's arm slid off her waist like it had never rested there. "Oooo, I- Oh, Gaius, are you okay?" Sumia's face was flaming, and she remained seated on the ground next to the boy.

Gaius straightened up. Digging a hand in his back pocket, he pulled out a crushed selection of sweets. "The concrete destroyed my day's stash," he announced, in the tone one would use to announce the cancellation of a long-planned, extravagant holiday.

"At least it spared your skull," Robin deadpanned before bending to Sumia. "Are you okay?" she asked, in a much more gentle tone.

Sumia flashed her now reddened palms. "Just some scraped hands. Nothing much for a klutz like me." Sully, Chrom, and Frederick, who all been inching closer to the girl, seemed to relax a little, although Sully was still glaring at Gaius as if he had tripped the brunette. In an unusual reversal, Gaius stared at Sumia, who was intent on studying everything except for her rescuer. "I can't believe I knocked you over again, Gaius." Standing back up, Sumia stuck a hand out for the boy.

"Gimme some credit." With Sumia's hand, Gaius pulled himself up. "I caught you both times." At some point, the game had started back up. Suddenly, Robin felt like an eavesdropper. "Just keep it quiet, would ya? A delinquent like me can't be helping dummies like you. Bad for the public image."

"Well, I think some of the public might have seen that last save." Dusting off her now slightly shredded tights, Sumia gave Gaius a delighted grin. "Guess we'll just have to be friends now. Anyways." Sumia whirled around to Robin. "I want to check on Cordelia. Is that okay?"

"Just tie your laces first." Tying up her shoes, Sumia jogged towards the newly assembled medical set up.

"Oi! Walk, Stumbles. Don't run," Gaius called after her. "Kid gives me a headache," he muttered to Robin. "You see why I try to avoid looking after her. Girl's a walking calamity."

"You worry about her," Robin announced. Gaius didn't deny her statement, and his grimace at her words only confirmed them. "Sumia appreciates it. I still dislike you, though."

"Awww, Bubbles, I know you're sweet on me." Reassembling his drum and sheet music, Gaius winked at her. With a warm face, Robin cursed her tendency to blush. "I think saving your friend there might have earned me a kiss."

"We aren't friends." At least, Sumia hadn't told her otherwise, and she just warned Gaius that they were friends. It seemed like these things required verbal confirmation.

"Riiiiight. Well, kiss me any time, Bubbles."

Her Biggest Fan

As the rest of the class chattered around them, Robin and Sumia sat in English. They had recently finished a short story on a man achieving his dreams and were now left to discuss their own dreams with a partner. Cupping her chin in her hands, Sumia scrunched her face together. "Mmm... You know, that's actually tricky, describing your dreams. Being professional writer would be nice... but I'd love to be able to bake the perfect pie... or, you know, I've always had this fantasy where I join the circus- Don't laugh!" Robin covered her grin with her hand as Sumia blushed. "What's your dream, Robin?"

"I dream to become a millionaire."

Sumia frowned. "That's not it. You said it with out hesitation." Robin raised an eyebrow at her. "What's your real dream? No lying."

Leaning back in her chair, Robin folded her arms. The classroom still buzzed in conversation, and Sumia smiled at the girl, eyes sparkling with expectation. "That is my dream." Robin stared up at the English classroom ceiling. Five pencil erasers peered down at her. Waving a hand at the ceiling, Robin said, "Looks like someone got bored."

With a huff, Sumia poked Robin's shoulder. "You're changing the subject. Earning lots of money is a side-effect of a certain lifestyle. It's too vague to be a dream." Robin stared up at the ceiling, and Sumia slid her chair a little closer to Robin's desk. "Robiiiiiiiin…"

"Some people just don't have dreams."

"That's not true. You're chewing on your bottom lip right now. I promise I won't laugh at it." Digging for her lip balm, Robin just shook her head at the brunette. Sumia frowned. "I… Fine." As the rest of the class talked on, the two drifted into awkward silence.

Before practice, Chrom was at the front of the band, with more new faces in tow. At Robin's arrival, he waved the girl over. "Who're they?" she asked, flinging an arm out at the students behind him.

"Newbies." Chrom was excited. It shone in his face, and the boy was having difficulties staying still. "Our performance on Friday inspired a few people."

Chrom pulled the boy forward first. The boy stuck one dirt smudged hand out to Robin and with a toothy grin, said, "Donnel. Pleased 'ta meetcha, m'am. I haven't ever played anythin' before, but y'all made it sound so fun, I just had to give it a try." Shaking his hand and then quickly dropping it, Robin sighed as Chrom shrugged. Another amateur it appeared she would have to deal with.

"I guess you can try drums. Gaius…" Gaius shook his head frantically. "I mean, Vaike…" The blonde grinned a little. In his enthusiastic waving, Vaike nearly upended the nearby snare drum. Robin could not squash a sense of foreboding at the idea of his tutoring someone. "Well… just go back there and we'll see what happens." With an eager nod, the boy trotted off to the back.

Chrom pushed the other new recruit forward. The Goth ducked away from his touch with a shudder and turned to Robin. "I know you," the Goth announced. Dark hair obscuring most of her face, the girl was unrecognizable.

"Look," Robin sighed. "I'm not in the mood for games. Just give me your name and instrument

and we can talk about this later."

"I've been to all your public performances. The one a few months ago at Ylistol Capitol Theatre was—"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Robin said flatly. "Now do you have a name and an instrument, or should I just pick something?"

"But—"

"No." Robin could hear her voice rising, feel her temperature rising. People were staring at her, and all she wanted was for them to go away.

"…Tharja. I play the clarinet, and I have all the ticket stubs from-"

Robin waved to the front row. "Just go sit next to my brother. Robert, meet Tharja." Tharja glanced at him over her shoulder but seemed unwilling to move. "Tharja, Donnel, I'm Robin. Nice to meet you." As Robin stood in front of her stand, she ignored Robert's attempts to catch her eye. Tharja slid in between Robert and Ricken and proceeded to stare at Robin in some sort of rapture. Robin could feel their gazes burning into her the entire practice. As soon as she ended band, Robin whirled out of the classroom before anyone could stop her.

Instead of the usual locker loiter, who Robin was beginning to miss, or Gaius, praise the higher powers, Tharja, lurking entirely in black again, leaned against the locker next Robin's the next morning. "Why, and how, are you here?" Robin hissed, bending down to open her locker. The door remained shut.

"I threatened one of those fools from yesterday into giving me your locker number. Speaking of which, is your brother around? I want to show him my doll collection." Evidently, Robin missed something yesterday, and she really did not want to know what.

"Robert already left to meet Lissa and Maribelle. Go away." Robin spun the lock around a few times. It rattled at her, a mockery.

Tharja twisted a few strands of long, dark hair around her fingers. "I wrote about our meeting yesterday on my blog. The passionate charge when our eyes finally met…" The Goth sighed happily. "I knew some day you would notice me."

Clenching her teeth, Robin contemplating beating her own head into the locker. Maybe it would open? "Listen. I appreciate that you've seen my performances." Tharja lit up instantly, the smile stiff and unpracticed. "But I'm… That's over. Done. Drop the subject."

Fiddling with the hem of her skirt, Tharja scowled down at Robin. "A prodigy such as yourself shouldn't hoard your talent." The locker wasn't opening. Robin stood up abruptly. She needed to walk somewhere, anywhere, run far away from this girl. "I saw you at that first concert, and I knew you were special. 'This girl is not like the others,' I told myself. We were ten, maybe younger. Your father led you on stage." Tharja's voice was hypnotic. Listening to it brought back that first performance, the blinding lights, roaring applause of the crowd, father's hand on her shoulder. "And your performance was beautiful. I—"

"Bubbles," Gaius strolled by, hands in his pockets. "And Sunshine." He pulled Robin back to Ylissean North High, the school where music meant nothing. "What's—"

"Go away." Her voice sounded tiny, distant.

Instead Gaius drew closer, placing a hand on her shoulder. His face was much too close and a little too blurry. "Oi. Robin, are you—"

"Go away," she shrieked. People were staring as if she were the soloist again in Ylistol Capitol Hall. Slapping Gaius's arm away, Robin stormed down the opposite end of the hall, far from Gaius and Tharja. The school was still unfamiliar, and Robin wandered until she found a deserted stairwell. She sat there. At some point, Gaius sat next to her. "Don't you have class to go to?" Robin mumbled, rubbing at her eyes hastily.

"And deprive you of my ravishing company?" Gaius leaned back on one of the steps. Resting her arms on her knees, Robin laid her forehead on her arms. "Wanna get out of here?"

Yes, but only father can take me that far away. "No." Robin's voice was muffled, but Gaius seemed to understand. The pair sat in silence.

After band, Robin watched her members trickle out slowly. Tharja approached her first. "…I have arranged punishment for the orange-haired buffoon for you." Apparently, she had no further explanation to give, and Tharja drifted towards the door. In the doorway, she stopped. "Robert, come discuss tarot cards with me."

At Robin's perplexed frown, Robert shrugged. "Complement a girl's pentagram necklace one time, and she wants to show you her voodoo dolls. Gaius's is filled with pins. Wonder what he did." Fidgeting with his hair, Robert lingered. "Do you…" Robin shook her head. Her voice still felt dried up and weak. "I'll see you at home, then." Robert trailed after Tharja, casting Robin one last glance as he slipped out.

Dropping some papers on her music stand, Stahl leaned on a corner of the stand. "Biology notes," he supplied, "You weren't there to keep me awake, so they may be a little shoddy in some parts." Stahl hesitated. "Are you feeling okay?" At his unusually serious tone, Robin felt an urge to cry again, but her eyes were hot, dry, and tired. Ducking down to get her bag, Robin could not look to Stahl. The boy sighed. "I know I said this on Friday, but everyone is here for you. Even if there's something you can't tell me… you can tell someone." Stahl straightened up, fingers drumming against the stand.

"…Thanks." Stahl's fingers quieted, and the boy meandered towards the door. It wasn't what he wanted. Robin knew it, but it was all she could supply at the moment. "I…" She clenched and unclenched her hands as Stahl rested on the doorframe.

"Take your time. I'll… We'll be here." Robin barely heard it.

With a flittering of fingers on Robin's shoulder, Sumia lingered at the girl's side. "I... I do hope we're friends, Robin." It seemed Sumia could not meet her eyes. Wringing her hands, the brunette stared aimlessly at the door as Robin did the same to her stand. "I know I've only been a burden but..."

Robin collected up her music and Stahl's notes into her bag. "You know how when you're six or seven, and your parents tell you that you can do anything, so you pick some random, stupid dream... And then you get older, and you realize just how random and stupid it was?" Unsure when she started talking, Robin was compelled to continue. "So you pick a new dream, and you think 'This is it. I could do this and be happy.' Well, sometimes that dream is stupid, too." Zipping up her bag, Robin hoisted it over her shoulder and stood up. She felt calmer somehow. "C'mon. Let's go. You should tell me what we did in English today."

Childish

A half-awake Stahl on one side, a bored Gaius on the other, Robin was at school on a Saturday. Cross-country runners were clustered in groups by penny color, and the band waited in the shade of the nearby trees. "We don't even have instruments," Robin growled. Gaius moaned, lying against a nearby tree. Ignoring him, Robin continued, "This isn't a pep band event. Why are we sweating out in the woods behind the school if we aren't even playing something?" Tugging her sticky shirt from its clinging position on her back, Robin glared in the direction of the Ylissean North cross-country team.

"I'm dyyyyyyyying over here." Lissa flopped to a seating position on the ground. "When are they going to give us something to do?"

"Robin!" Sumia jogged over to the group, a red-head, Cordelia, Robin recalled, hobbling after her on a crunch. With an exaggerated huff, Gaius pulled himself back up. Despite the stray hair stuck to her face and the flush of her cheeks, Sumia was cheery. "Chrom's stuck in a pep talk, but they sent me over to give you guys directions." Shooting Cordelia a curious glance, Robin gleaned nothing from the girl's polite smile.

Pulling out a small map, Sumia continued. "Here's the race course. We need people in the places marked to hand out water or direct runners. Supplies are the stadium storage shed." As Robin split the band into groups, Sumia hovered behind her. "I… have a favor to ask." Nudging Cordelia forward, Sumia chirped, "Meet Cordelia."

"You're Robin, right? Sumia's told me so much about you," Cordelia said. Although the girl was cordial, Robin felt on edge.

Robin nodded at the red-head. "Pleased to meet you."

Oblivious to the tenuous undercurrent, Sumia grinned even wider. "Cordelia volunteered to help run the cross-county meet stuff, too. I think this would be a good time for you guys to bond. Will you let her work with you?"

While Cordelia was rather kind, the longer Robin sat between her and Stahl's conversation, the more tense she felt. "Sooo, you're captain of the women's soccer team, top of our academic class, second in command to Chrom on student council, president of the Science Olympiad team, is there anything you can't do?"

"Well, there is this sighing habit Sumia likes to remind me off…" Robin laughed politely. Cordelia smiled, but Stahl gave her an odd look.

"What?"

Stahl widened his eyes at her. "Eh? Nothing. Oh, look." Pointing down the wooded path, Stahl rose from his seat to wave to Chrom. Unlike Robin, who cringed internally at the sweat trickling down her back, Chrom seemed to enjoy the heat. Grinning, Chrom snatched a water cup from Cordelia and gave the trio a quick wave. "He's the first runner, right? Oh, wait. There's Vaike, too."

Robin held a water cup out to the blonde as Stahl waved again. Watching the other end of the path, Cordelia seemed lost in thought. Grabbing the water cup, Vaike dumped it over his head before tossing the now crushed cup back to Robin. "Hey!" Gritting her teeth, Robin rocketed out

of her seat. At Cordelia's curious gaze, she sat down abruptly. Screaming at Vaike may not have been what Sumia wanted for bonding. "I… uh… was feeling a bit stiff. Um… So?" Stahl seemed rather interested in the trees, suppressing some sort of laughter, or maybe concern.

"So, you're president of the pep band?" Despite her collared, buttoned up shirt, Cordelia looked perfectly put together, not the least upset by the heat. Even in her t-shirt and shorts, Robin suspected she looked more overheated than the girl.

"Actually, Chrom's the president. I'm just the conductor." Flashing another pleasant smile, Cordelia offered a water cup to another runner. "But I do just about everything except set up our events." For some reason, it seemed important to impress Cordelia or at least get a reaction from her that wasn't that smile. For the last twenty minutes, that expression, almost patronizing, seemed pasted to Cordelia's face.

"Ah, well running a club is hard work. I'm sure Chrom appreciates all the help you give him."

"He does."

"Sumia tells me all about it."

"Well, Sumia tells me all about—" What? The pie she baked two days ago? How many laps Chrom ran on Wednesday?

Thrusting a flower in front of her face, Stahl cut Robin off. "Here," he said with a smile. Taking the delicate yellow flower, Robin felt rather ridiculous. As was becoming apparent, Sumia didn't really tell her much of anything. More for something to do, Robin downed one of the water cups. "Hey, I went through all kinds of trouble to get that flower. You should be treasuring it."

Picking the flower off the table, Robin twirled it around. With that gracious smile, Cordelia passed out another water cup. Robin slipped the flower behind her ear. She felt silly, and Stahl's widening grin was making her feel sillier. Avoiding eye contact with Cordelia, Stahl, and the passing runners, Robin watched the flow of water as she filled more water cups.

Heaving the table, chairs, water jug, and left over cups back to Ylissean North's stadium, Robin and her companions found everyone else waiting for them. Robin dropped the water jug on the ground with a scowl. Although Cordelia was still somewhere behind her shoulder, Robin was tired of being pleasant. "Remind me never to do this again." A few others moaned in agreement.

Robert shrugged. With the longer ends of his hair tied back, the boy looked only sweatier and more tired. "Chrom asked us to help out. Said the publicity would be good."

Usually stoic, Lon'qu plopped on the ground with a growl. "You can tell him where to shove his publicity. Too hot for this."

"Heeeeeeeey!" A little girl, a freshman, Robin supposed, ran up to them. Her shirt was tied up to expose the girl's stomach, and she seemed unaffected by the heat. "Woweee! You guys are all Chrom's friends? What are you all lying around for? C'mon with me to the locker room." The girl jogged off, green ponytail bouncing behind her, and the band scrambled after her.

Despite the runners crammed inside, the locker room was deliciously cool. With a sigh, Lissa rested her cheek on the cold metal of one of the lockers, and the usually reserved Maribelle seemed to be contemplating the same. Ankle evidently bothering her more than she expressed, Cordelia sat down quickly. Standing on one of the benches, the little girl was only slightly taller than Chrom standing next to her. At the band's arrival, Chrom, Sully, and the other band runners

gave waves of varying enthusiasm. The green-haired girl grinned widely at them. Resting an arm on Chrom's head, she pointed a finger at the band. "I wanna join your music thingy, Blue," she announced. "I say eeeeveryone here is going to join Chrom's band."

The cross-country team shuffled around, but no one seemed willing to contradict the girl. "Uh, Nowi, I don't think you can do that," Chrom supplied. "We appreciate it though."

Pouting, Nowi stuck her tongue out at the boy. "Fiddlesticks. Chrom, you're no fun." She pushed herself off his head and twirled around. "What's the point of being boss if you can't order people around?" With a sigh, Nowi began to pace down the line of benches, hopping over the gaps that separated them. "Well, ignore stick-in-the-mud Chrom… You guys did awesome!" She thrust a tiny fist into the air as the cross-country team cheered. "Yay super-extremely-dull Chrom and much-more-fun Vaike for getting first and second place in the men's, and yay Kjelle the freshie for getting second place in the women's!" Nearby members clapped Vaike on the back, and Sully wrapped a hand around Chrom's shoulder with a grin. With a poorly hidden smile, a pony-tailed girl nudged another. One of them must be Kjelle, Robin decided.

Stepping over one of the seated cross-country members, Nowi turned back to the band. "Also, let's give a big cheer for Chrom's band. You guys are great at holding water cups." Despite the compliment's dubious nature, the cross country team cheered anyways. "Alright," Nowi cried over the applause. "What are you all hanging around here for? Get outta here, slowpokes."

As the team dispersed, Chrom piped up hastily, "Don't forget there's no practice on Thursday. Instead we'll be organizing our supplies for the school Fall Festival." Chrom continued talking, but Nowi skipped over to Robin instead of listening.

Hopping off of the bench, the girl came up to her shoulder. "Leading a club is tough stuff, neh?" Sticking a hand on her waist, Nowi thrust the other one out to Robin. "I'm Nowi, team co-captain with Mr. Serious." Nowi pumped Robin's hand up and down with a grin. "I'm a junior, which makes me your senior, so listen to what I say, okay?" Nowi's overabundance of energy reminded Robin how exhausted she was. Before Robin could escape, Nowi was chattering away, steering the conversation firmly.

"I need your opinion, Robin." Tharja stood outside the girl's locker, as Robin once again struggled with the lock. "Which of these best portrays your male counterpart?" Holding two equally creepy dolls with pale hair, Tharja watched Robin expectantly.

"You mean Robert, my brother?" Robin missed her locker lurker. "Ask him. Go away."

Tharja scowled but thrust the dolls closer to Robin's face. "I wish to talk with you. Because you do not wish to talk about music, I must discuss one of your other interests. Robert expressed curiosity in my dolls earlier, and it is important I show him my best work. Incidentally, do you have a lock of his hair on hand?"

"I—What? No."

"May I have another lock of your hair, instead? I'm afraid I'm already using the one I took last week in your doll. With your twin connection, your hair should substitute quite nicely for Robert's hair." Robin opened her mouth to respond but shut it instead. Some statements had no reply. Robin began to walk towards biology, but Tharja trailed after her. "Cordelia… The dark auras radiating from the two of you are positively delicious. I could trade. A lock of Robert's hair for a good curse?"

"Cordelia hasn't done anything," Robin replied. "We've been perfectly polite."

"Doesn't mean she hasn't thought about doing something nasty," Tharja muttered. "Doesn't mean you haven't thought about it either."

Spinning around, Robin glared at the Goth. "Doesn't mean you're going to do anything about it. Cordelia is Sumia's friend and as such is exempt from curses."

Tharja scowled, wrapping some strands of hair around a finger. "You didn't care when I cursed Gaius last—"

"Far as I know, Gaius had a bad migraine." Robin turned back around and strode into Biology. "No cursing Cordelia," she yelled behind her.

Robin dropped her Biology notebook on the table with a thunk. Jerked from his nap, Stahl smiled hazily at the girl. Propping his chin up with one hand, he pushed some sort of breakfast pastry towards Robin with the other. "Mornin'"

"Shove off." Robin grabbed half the pastry anyways.

"Eh?" Breaking a piece of the other half of the pastry, Stahl continued to study her.

"That's the 'I'm going to make Robin feel guilty with my moral support' face." Stahl widened his eyes in innocence. "I don't want to hear it today," she growled. "Tharja already offered me moral support." Collapsing back over the table, Stahl's smile was now mostly obscured by his arm.

"Well, I'm going to point out anyways that there's no reason to compete with Cordelia." At Robin's glare, Stahl shrugged. "You're different people in different situations. Why worry? Also, that fake laugh from Saturday was terrifying."

Flipping through her notebook, Robin avoided his eyes. "I'm not competing with Cordelia." Sitting back up, Stahl pulled his own notebook from his bag. "I'm just… I don't know. Something about her puts me… on edge."

"Well, Sumia cares—Hey," Stahl broke off abruptly. Casting him a sideways glance, Robin found the boy twirling a yellow wildflower. At his grin, Robin lunged for the flower, but Stahl held it just out of reach. "I know this flower," he announced.

"Robert was being all weird about it, so I took the flower out while studying. Guess it fell in my notes." Stahl continued grinning. Jerking to her feet, Robin snatched the flower from his hand. "I forgot I even had the flower in when I left the stadium." Her face was bright red. Even pointedly avoiding eye contact with the boy, Robin could tell Stahl didn't believe her.

"You're using the flower I gave you as a bookmark." Stahl was delighted, and it was only making Robin feel more self-conscious. "Robin, are we perhaps… friends?"

"Just shut up, Stahl." Robin placed the flower back in her notebook. "And before you go getting ideas, people don't give me things often. I guess I just held on to it out of habit."

Stahl chuckled. "Well, we are, whether you like it or not." The idea was comforting for some reason. At the sound of the classroom door closing, the boy returned to seriousness once more. "Sumia is, too, you know. For all your worries about Cordelia, do be confident that Sumia cares about you," he whispered. Ms. Miriel took her place at the front of the class, and Stahl said no more.

Entering the band room, Robin found Cordelia and Sumia seated side by side. Waving Robin

over, Sumia placed a hand on Cordelia's shoulder. "Guess who's joining the band," she squealed. Cordelia nodded at Robin. "I've been teaching her mellophone, but Cordelia's already better than me," Sumia exclaimed. "I want you guys to become friends."

Presenting a hand to Robin, Cordelia gave her another of her smiles. "I look forward to watching your conducting skills in action."

As the two firmly shook hands, Robin returned Cordelia's smile. While the girl was only polite, Robin felt egged on by her words. "And I look forward to hearing you play." Taking her place at the front of the band, Robin began to set out the day's work, rolling her eyes at Stahl's concerned expression.

As Robin was picking scores for the day's practice, Nowi skipped in and threw a rock, whistling past Robin's ear, to smack Chrom on the forehead. As Chrom sighed and Robin frowned, Nowi proceeded to squish herself between the clarinets and flutes. The girl was serious about joining the band. Twisting around in her new seat, Nowi chirped at Chrom, "I saw that rock on the way to band and thought of you. It's blue, you're blue. It's shiny, you're… shiny?" Nowi grinned, as Chrom bent over to locate where the rock had ricocheted to.

"Nowi," Robin barked. Spinning around to a seated position, Nowi kicked her feet rhythmically. Robin could feel the band's eyes, Cordelia's eyes on her. Unlike Chrom, Robin was going to control this green-haired disaster.

"Wowzers!" Leaning across Robert's lap, Nowi plucked Tharja's voodoo doll out of her hand. Oblivious to the one dark storm brewing two seats down and the other directly in front of her, Nowi studied the figure. Robert simply stared at her in horror. With a smile, Nowi dropped it back on Tharja's lap. "Nice. Looks just like this guy." As Nowi poked a relieved Robert, Tharja seemed appeased.

"Nowi," Robin cried again. The girl looked back up, with another grin. "If you wish to stay in this band, you have to listen to what I say, and quiet down when I'm talking." Nowi puffed her cheeks out like a small blowfish but was silent. "Good," Robin said. "Now what instrument do you play?" Pulling a small case from her bag, Nowi held it in front of her face. "Well?" Scowling, Nowi seemed unwilling to say more. Cordelia was watching them. Robin could sense it. "You can talk, Nowi."

"Piccolo."

Nowi was decent at it, too. Although the girl seemed more dedicated to making the maximum amount of noise, Nowi kept up with the band. Donnel, Robin noted, was making impressive strides. Stahl had mentioned something on Saturday about helping the boy with rhythms, and it was working. With reluctance, Robin also noted Cordelia was good, quite good, easily surpassing Sumia and most of the band in technique and musicality. A small part, a rather nasty part, cursed at that, but Robin squished it quickly.

As the band dispersed, Robin approached Cordelia. "You sound good," she said. Cordelia looked up at her. With a quick glance, Robin found Sumia on the other side of the room, chatting with Gaius. "Look. Sumia wants us to be friends. I'll just be blunt here. Do you—"

"Your conducting was also good." Rising up, Cordelia lent on her crutch, smiling at Robin. It was a hollow smile once more. "You handled Nowi well." The little junior was currently running around the room with Chrom's trumpet high over her head. Chrom massaged his forehead as Vaike gave him a resigned smile, the one given to a doomed man. "Let's be friends." As Sumia dragged a scowling Gaius over towards the pair, Robin was rather sure she and Cordelia were not

friends at all.

Fall Festival

Robin pulled a chair up next to Sumia, as Chrom took Robin's usual place at the front of the band. "Fall Festival stuff," she muttered to Sumia's curious glance. "What even is Fall Festival?"

Eyes shining, Sumia clapped her hands together. Before she could begin, Cordelia replied instead. "It's a sort of club fair. Everyone sets up little booths to attract new members or raise money for some project. Usually the club president organizes it."

Chrom chuckled. "Well, I guess everyone just heard that succinct description." Although she laughed depreciatively, Cordelia sat a little higher in her seat. Placing his hands on Robin's stand, Chrom took his place like it was a podium. "For our booth, well, perhaps Sumia would like to introduce it? It is your idea after all." With a grin, Chrom turned to the flustered brunette. Scrambling to her feet, Sumia knocked over her stand. Righting herself on Chrom's proffered arm, Sumia, beet red, took his place at the front.

"Um… So I was thinking…" Fidgeting with the buttons on her shirt, Sumia looked to Chrom. The boy smiled. "Um, we could sell things. Pies!" Stahl perked up at that. One or two other band members looked intrigued. "I thought maybe we could have a bake sale, of not just pies," she added. As Sumia spoke, she straightened, mimicking Chrom's earlier position. "And the profits we raise could go to buying a uniform shirt. With official shirts, we would stand out better at games. So, umm… yeah, that's what we're doing, I guess." Sumia laughed nervously.

After she finished, Chrom retook his place, nudging a blushing Sumia back to her seat. Robin and Cordelia each smiled at the girl. As Sumia returned to her chair, Chrom said, "Alright, everyone give Sumia some applause for her brilliant idea." The band clapped vigorously.

Sumia buried her reddened face in her hands. "No one's ever called me brilliant before," she mumbled.

After a moment's hesitation, Robin patted the girl's shoulder. "Well, you are, dummy."

"You underestimate yourself," Cordelia added. Brushing some hair over one shoulder, she shot Robin some undecipherable expression. Unsure what she had done, Robin still could not crush the feeling Cordelia disliked her.

"Instead of regular practice today," Chrom said, "We'll be setting up our banner, table decorations, and what not. I've already decided who's doing what, so everyone stay where you are until I call your name." As Chrom ran through his list, the band split into various groups. Finally, Cordelia and Robin were the only two left. "Alright, Cordelia and Robin, you guys are going to either record what dishes people volunteer or sign them up for something," Chrom said.

"You know, I thought we were practicing today." Robin sat her arms on her hips with a glare. "Didn't feel like mentioning that one, huh?" Chrom shrugged. Before Robin could object, he began to wander off.

"Wait," Cordelia called after him. Hobbling towards him, the girl flashed him one of her smiles. "This job doesn't need two people. Let me or Robin take care of it and the other do something helpful elsewhere." Silently, Robin agreed.

However, Chrom did not. Running an arm up and down one sleeveless shoulder, Chrom avoided Cordelia's gaze. He had a tattoo, some symbol Robin noted for the first time but didn't recognize. "Cordelia." He locked eyes with the red-head. At the sudden eye contact, Cordelia stood

straighter, smoothing out her skirt. "Relaaaaax." Chrom said the word as an exhale. Wilting a little, Cordelia straightened up quickly. "If I let you have your way, you'd be sending everyone home and doing all their jobs. Let us help." Chrom grinned at her.

"Ah, right." Cordelia rearranged her hair once more, returning Chrom's smile.

"Also," Chrom's deep voice was serious. "You haven't healed yet. This is a quick job, so I want you to do it and go home. If you feel like you're placing too much stress on that foot, just sit down. Okay? The only reason I don't have you making fliers is because there aren't any tables in here." Chrom thought for a moment. Cordelia's smile was weakening. "Don't sit on the ground, or help people lift things. Robin, I'm counting on you to keep an eye on her. Just take it easy, Cordelia." Cordelia sighed, but Chrom walked off to join one of the groups.

Digging through her bag, Robin pulled out one of her notebooks. Cordelia drummed her fingers against her crutch. "C'mon. We should probably just start in the corner and circle our way around," Robin said. Cordelia jerked up. Evidently, Robin had interrupted some serious thought.

"Is there another way to do it?" Ignoring that, Robin waited for the girl to move. Cordelia began to maneuver around the stands and bags. As people had begun to retrieve writing supplies, the bags had slowly encroached the rest of the floor. Moving to collect some of the backpacks, Robin felt a little guilty watching the red-head struggle. "I can do this," Cordelia snapped. With a raised eyebrow, Robin dropped Maribelle's handbag on the girl's chair. In her peripherals, Robin could see Sumia watching them carefully. Cordelia scowled. Sighing again, she hung her head. When she rose it, the girl was smiling pleasantly. "Sorry. Thank you for your help, Robin, but I don't need it." Gaius pulled Sumia away, out of Robin's sight.

Cordelia inched between Lissa's backpack and the girl's stand. Watching her wiggle around Lissa's obstacle course, Robin strode ahead of the girl. As she hovered at the end of the row, Robin waited for Cordelia. "Look. This is going to take all day. It's not your fault everyone upended their bags. Just…" Cordelia hobbled over Lon'qu's last water bottle. The girl's triumphant grin quickly slid off at Robin's gaze. "That would have been a lot faster if you just let me help." Cordelia snatched Robin's notebook from her hands and started towards the first group.

Maribelle's fliers had the best handwriting. Looking up from her flowing script, Maribelle returned to her sign making at the sight of Robin and Cordelia. Ricken's were eloquent as well. His face scrunched in concentration, the boy did not seem to notice their approach. "…Need something?" Lon'qu grunted. His fliers were direct, big, black letters outlining pep band responsibilities. Next to Lissa's, Maribelle's, and Ricken's stacks, his was easily the highest.

"Yeah, actually," Robin said. With a tsk, Maribelle looked up from her sign. Holding a colorful flier Robin supposed was finished, Lissa grinned expectantly. "…Nice?" Best as Robin could tell, it was a collection of colorful blobs. A few of those may have comprised a person

As Maribelle plucked it from Lissa's grasp, the girl pouted at Robin. "It certainly… has its charms." Ricken peered over her shoulder but said nothing. Passing it to Lon'qu, Maribelle glanced to Robin. Evidently, it was indecipherable to Maribelle and Ricken as well.

"…It's you." Lon'qu squinted at Lissa's picture some more. "…And that's… a saxophone. And Chrom over there. Good work." Lon'qu placed the paper on Lissa's stack. To Robin, it still looked like a collection of colorful blobs. Studying the paper, Cordelia seemed stumped.

"Obviously," Lissa huffed. "You're the only one here with an eye for art, Lon'qu."

Indignant, Maribelle set her current flier to the side. "Yes, well, I need something from you guys first," Robin piped up. "What are you bringing on Friday?"

As they finished, Robin turned to Cordelia. The girl was struggling to balance the notebook, record everyone's info, and keep the crutch in its place. Robin sighed. "Just let me—"

"No," Cordelia replied coolly. "I have this under control." Finishing Lissa's entry, Cordelia studied the pen. With the crutch, the girl could not return it to its clipped position in the metal of the spiral notebook. After tucking the pen behind her ear, Cordelia led the way to the next crowd of people.

In the middle of a collection of printed papers, Robert scowled, Virion sitting at his side, Tharja hovering over his shoulder. Stepping around their paperwork, Robin bent at Virion's side. Cordelia hovered at the edge of the paperwork. "Hey," Robert said. "Robin, Cordelia, what's up?"

"Chrom needs to know what we're bringing to the bake sale on Friday," Robin said.

"He has us planning out the shifts. Turns out everyone here is in loads of other activities." Robert sighed. "Anyways, is there anyone you guys wanted to work with? I think I've already filled Sumia's. Sorry."

"Is…Ah, never mind." Robin felt stupid vocalizing it.

"Cordelia?"

The red-head smoothed out her skirt again. "I… um… You can just fit me wherever."

Chuckling, Robert shook his head. "You two are awfully similar in some regards. You sure? I haven't assigned him yet." At the mention of 'him,' Cordelia's blush deepened.

"It's okay, my dear," Virion said. Running a hand through his hair, the boy winked at the red-head. "When faced with my magnificence, most find it—"

"Does someone hear a fool's prattling?" Tharja glared at Virion. With a dramatic sigh, Virion returned to the paperwork. From their time spent in Robert's company, it appeared the two had developed an odd companionship. After collecting their information, Robin looked to Cordelia. While still attempting to juggle slightly too much, Cordelia managed the writing much quicker.

Stahl, Donnel, and the tall boy, Kellam, Robin had to remind herself, were making more fliers. After signing them up and learning most of the left over members were out collecting tables, Robin made her way to Sumia and Gaius. The two were working on opposite ends of a banner. At the pair's approach, Sumia waved, splattering paint in the process. With a groan, Sumia dropped her paintbrush back in the paint can. "Gaius…"

"Crivens, Stumbles. Are those more paint splashes?" Gaius wiped his paint stained hands on his jeans. Sidling over to the brunette, Gaius placed a hand on his chin. Studying the banner, the boy grimaced. From her overhead angle, Robin could see Gaius's end with its hideous handwriting and Sumia's, which looked like the girl had experimented with splatter paint. "We'll just have to tell Chrom this was on purpose." Running his fingers through his hair, Gaius looked to Robin. "Whaddya want, Bubbles?"

Gaius's paint-stained hands were leaving a black trail across his face and pants. Deciding it did not clash too horribly with the rest of him, Robin chose not to mention it. "I need to know what you guys are bringing on Friday," she said.

"Me," Gaius said as Robin scowled at him. "My wonderful presence?"

"Will you be for sale Gaius? I'd be more than happy to unload you on someone."

"Would anyone buy him though?" Robin couldn't hide her burst of laughter, as Cordelia looked down on Gaius icily. It appeared he had done something to irk Cordelia as well.

"See this, Stumbles? Your friends are bullies." As Gaius pouted, Sumia patted the boy on the head with a poorly hidden smile. Rolling her eyes, Robin could feel herself anyways. Behind her, Cordelia sighed. "I'll bring fudge," Gaius muttered. "No one appreciates me," he added to Sumia.

"Pooooor Gaius," Sumia teased. "I appreciate you. Don't worry." Gaius stuck his tongue out at Robin and Cordelia. "I'll bring a pie. Rhubarb maybe?"

Returning to their seats, Robin was unsure what to do. Chrom had yet to return, and most of the work was already being done. As she sat down, Cordelia tossed a backwards glance to Gaius. "He's only going to get her in trouble," the red-head muttered. Robin shrugged. While Gaius was a pain, he seemed good-natured at heart. "If you were her friend, you would agree with me." Shifting her glare from Gaius to Robin, Cordelia brushed some hair over her shoulder. Despite the girl's efforts, her red locks seemed determined to fly away.

"Sumia can do what she wants," Robin replied. She could feel the tension from the past few days returning. Breaking her thoughts, the band door clicked opened. Thankful for the distraction, Robin turned her head. "Oh, Gregor, is there something I can help you with?"

Waving some paperwork at the pair, Gregor gave them a kind smile, intimidating on his rugged face. "Here. Gregor is needing this for the booth. Easy work." As Robin rose to her feet, Cordelia limped after her. "Oi. Is Cordelia now in band?"

Cordelia nodded. "I must have dropped the paperwork by the office when you weren't around Gregor. Sorry." Gregor led the pair out to the hallway. On a nearby windowsill, Robin began to fill out Gregor's papers, simple questions on the nature of the booth.

Frowning, Gregor folded his arms across his chest. "Gregor is thinking band and soccer on same days…" Cordelia laughed, but it sounded unusually high. "Flavia also be telling Gregor things… Cordelia is team captain of the soccer team, yes? The ankle—"

"Is feeling just fine, actually," Cordelia said. The girl was drumming her fingers against her crutch again. Even with her back turned, Robin could hear the rhythmic beating of finger on wood. "Thank you for your concern." Cordelia was probably granting Gregor one of her gracious smiles.

Thrusting the paperwork back to Gregor, Robin frowned. "Here. Bye, Gregor." The older man shrugged but left quietly. Turning to Cordelia, Robin found the girl scowling at the ground. "I got rid of the meddling old man for you. Now let's get a move on."

Quickening her fingers, Cordelia whipped her head back up. Barely taller than Robin, Cordelia seemed to tower over the girl. "Don't think this act of kindness endears you to me. I don't need your false pity."

"I didn't—"

Fixing her hair once more, Cordelia rolled her eyes at Robin. "I'm no fool. You're all liars. Just stay away from me, and stay away from Sumia."

"You don't get to—" However, Cordelia was already striding, best she could with her crutch, back into the music room. Trailing off, Robin scowled at the girl's mess of hair. Unwilling to carry their budding argument into Sumia's hearing range, Robin followed Cordelia silently.

Clustered in one corner of the music room, the pep band organized themselves around the official

school band and the school's miscellaneous music groups on Friday. As Chrom, Sully, Frederick, and Vaike heaved the tables, and Nowi, perched on Chrom's and Frederick's table, back into the hall, Stahl and Robin followed them with a pair of chairs. "So I saw we're going to be last shift buddies," Stahl said.

"Don't get any ideas," Robin replied. "You aren't eating the pies on my watch." Smiling, Stahl placed his chair next to Robin's. As tables were set up and the hall began to fill, band members drifted off gradually. Placing his plate of brownies at one end of the table, Stahl wandered down one end of the hall. "I have to meet with the swim team, but I'll be back. Come see us," Stahl called over his shoulder to Robin. Hastily setting down a case of bottled water, the tall boy, Kellam, jogged after him. Robin supposed they were in the swim team together.

As the table began to fill with delicious smelling baked goods, Sully and Vaike took the chairs on the other side. Now that their display was complete, Robin winced at the visual effect. Gaius's and Sumia's banner, while emblazoned with 'Pep Band' in large dark letters, was just as disastrous looking as it had been while they were painting it. Out of the fliers, only Maribelle's, Ricken's, and someone else's, Stahl's or Kellam's perhaps, were visually appealing. Sully seemed to be thinking the same. "At least the food looks good," she said. Reaching for a cookie, Vaike grunted in agreement. "Oi!" Sully smacked his hand. Looking to Robin, Sully added, "We've got it here. I think Lissa wants to show you around."

The blonde had been hovering silently behind Robin, but at Sully's words, Lissa looped Robin's arm through her own. "It was going to be a sneak attack, Sully." With a quick pout, Lissa waved to Sully and Vaike. "Let's goooo," Lissa cried, pointing Robin down one end of the hall. The bell for third period, today Fall Festival, chimed as Lissa skipped down the hallway, Robin half-jogging after her.

As students began to mill through the hallways, Robin felt a little lost in the commotion. "It's more an event for freshmen than anything else," Lissa cried over the roar of the crowd. Squeezing between a cluster of chattering students, Robin was grateful for Lissa's little hand on her arm. Not that she would say it, of course. "So this is my first—Oooo! There's Virion manning the chess club table," Lissa chirped, waving at the boy. Oblivious to his attempts to flirt, a girl was deep in conversation with him. At Lissa's voice, Virion looked up to wave at the pair before the crowd whisked them away.

A few tables down, Lissa tugged Robin across the hall to another setup. Only the girl's surprisingly strong grip kept Robin from being buffeted by the flow of the crowd. "Maribelle," Lissa squealed, "Your table looks adorable." Sitting on the other side of a pink and lace bedecked table, Maribelle flipped some curls over her shoulder. Before they could get closer, the crowd swept Lissa and Robin away.

As they approached another table, black draped, Robin could barely spy Tharja in the middle of the crowd, an array of tarots cards fanned over the table. At the center, Robert, surrounded by a throng of students too packed to maneuver through, watched on in fascination as Tharja said something to him. Guiding her around the crowd, Lissa mouthed 'occult club' before pulling Robin to another table. "Lon'qu," Lissa cried.

With a wave and some bouncing, Lissa tugged Robin to the fencing table. The crowd thinned, likely intimidated by the trio sitting at the table. Glancing at the paper handouts, Robin could tell Lon'qu wrote them all. The boy, with several feet between him and his two female tablemates, glared at the female passersby, softening his features at the sight of Lissa. In the middle, a girl with a bob Robin recognized from cross-country studied her with a critical eye. Folding her arms across her chest, the girl remained quiet. "Oh, Lucina, I didn't know you fenced." At the right of the quiet girl, another looked to Lissa with a slight smile. "Lucy's my cousin," Lissa said, pulling Robin to

the right. "This is Robin."

"Pleased to meet you," Lucina said with a nod. With the same hair and confident bearing, Lucina looked like a female version of Chrom, if more reserved. Her aloof gaze seemed to be intimidating any visitors not scared away by Lon'qu's scowl or the middle girl's appraisal.

"Alright, Lucy, Lon'qu, Robin and I wanna see everything else. See ya," Lissa chirped, pulling Robin away once more. Between Lissa's tugging and the push of the crowd, Robin was beginning to feel like a rag doll. Skipping by the student council, Lissa waved to Chrom. With relief, Robin saw Cordelia, who she recalled as Chrom's second in command, was not there.

"Oh, hang on. That's the swim team over there." Robin pointed to one of the far tables. Surrounded by a small crowd, Robin could barely see Stahl and Kellam in the middle. The girl chewed on her lip. Stahl had invited her to say hello, but now that the moment came, Robin could not think of a pretense to approach their table. While Lissa had done it at the past few tables, to just say hello felt silly. Students, some with sharp elbows, crowded around the halted girls, now an obstacle.

Following her finger, Lissa rocked up and down giddily. "Well, what are you waiting for? Let's go." Before Robin could object, Lissa was ducking around arms, taking Robin with her. Threading through some students, Lissa brought herself and Robin to the front of the table. "Boo!"

Kellam jumped. With a little wave, he smiled hesitantly at the girls before returning to his conversation. Deep in his own discussion with some other students, Stahl did not look up. One hand holding back his perpetually messy hair, the other gesturing something, the boy glowed with enthusiasm. The crowd of students, a large number of them female, Robin noted, was enthralled. As Lissa poked her in the ribs, Robin suddenly felt rather stupid. "We said hi," she mumbled. "Now let's go. They're busy."

Lissa stopped her poking. "Eh? Are you—"

"Let's go." Robin wiggled back into the flow of moving students, Lissa trailing after her.

"But Robiiiiiin," Lissa tugged Robin back to the swim team. "Oh wait!" The girl perked up instantly. "There's Cordelia. Let's say hi to her, too." As Lissa led Robin to the Science Olympiad booth, Robin regretted the decision to leave the swim team.

Rather than the chaos of handwritten fliers at the pep band table, the Science Olympiad team had organized stacks of printed works, with small displays of various events. "Cordelia," a rather chipper Goth called, "Look, fresh meat. Nyah ha ha." His dark clothes only accentuating his pale skin, the boy smiled widely at them. Lissa returned the smile, as Cordelia joined the boy at his side. "I'm Henry. Wanna join Science Olympiad?"

"Don't worry about them, Henry," Cordelia said, shifting her crutch. Whether the comment was intended to be demeaning or not, Robin frowned. "This is Lissa…" The blonde waved at Henry. "And this is Robin. We're in band together."

"Wowzers! I didn't know you were musical, Cordelia." Although Henry seemed in earnest, Cordelia gave him another of her hollow smiles. Robin wondered how many other people found that smile off-putting. It seemed Henry did, too, and at Cordelia's expression his own stiffened. Straighting her hair, Cordelia gave Robin a sidelong glance.

"Well, this was nice, Lissa," Robin announced. "Let's head back to the band table. Your shift starts soon." While she did not vocalize it, Robin could feel Cordelia wishing her away. Lissa

scrunched her face in a pout, but waving to Henry and Cordelia, the girl let Robin tug her back from where they came.

Leaving Lissa at the band table, Robin spent most of third period browsing the tables with Robert, Sumia, and whoever was free at the moment. As the number of students wandering the halls began to dwindle, Robin took her seat at the pep band table. It appeared the last fifteen minute shift was devoted to the stragglers.

"You're late," Stahl declared. Munching on a cookie suspiciously familiar to some on one of the pep band plates, the boy flopped over on the table. Now mostly empty, the table was graced with a few remnants of food and a large number of Lissa's fliers. Only Sully's blackened concoction, which she claimed was a plate of blueberry muffins, remained untouched. "And you missed Cordelia nearly smack Gaius for stealing a slice of Sumia's pie." Evidently, Gaius liked living dangerously.

Paying out a customer, Stahl threaded a hand through his olive locks. As the student left, Stahl seemed devoted to making little patterns in the ripples of the tablecloth fabric. It was brocade, unusually soft, and probably provided by Maribelle. "You said hi to Kellam," Stahl said abruptly. His arm obscured his face, hand still tangled in his messy hair.

Chewing on her lip, Robin could feel her own face heating up again. "I waved. You were busy." Another student bought the last of Donnel's carrot cake. While Robin paid him out, she could feel Stahl studying her. "Isn't there somewhere else to look?" Stahl returned to his creation of ripple patterns. "I just…" It was important to say something. Robin only needed to glance at the boy's unusual stoic face to understand that he deserved an explanation.

Fumbling for the right words, Robin crossed her arms, leaning back in her chair. "You looked so engaged that I couldn't bring myself to interrupt you." Her lower lip was beginning to feel a little raw. "…And then the crowd… You have a little fan club, Stahl." Robin attempted to be humorous, but in her ears, it sounded a little forced.

The boy laughed at that. "That's Chrom's fan club." Peaking out over the curve of his arm, Stahl's smile cheered Robin. Slightly. Not that she would admit it. "One of the side effects of befriending Chrom, as I am surprised you have yet to learn, is that students of both genders will harass you for information on him. As it so happens, while Chrom is not a member of the swim team because of his other sports commitments, he usually swims laps alongside us." Robin raised an eyebrow. "Sportsy people… Anyways, after I gave them the recruitment speech, a good half grilled me on the best angle from which to observe Chrom's biceps glistening in the chlorine. Wanna know which one?"

Robin snorted. "Whaddya think?" The hall was nearly deserted. Club members trailed back to the tables that still remained, beginning the cleaning process. While Chrom's biceps, which Robin would never admit rather suited him, did not merit questioning, the boy's tattoo did. However, now that the usual atmosphere between her and Stahl had returned, Robin was unwilling to break it.

"Were you—" Looking up, Robin watched Stahl trail off, instead waving to Chrom and Sumia.

Sumia gave them a finger-wiggly wave. Meandering up to the table, the girl plucked the roster sheet from under one of the plates. After a quick glance, Sumia held it out for Chrom, Robin, and Stahl to see. From across the table, most of it was illegible. "We filled it up." Wringing her hands together, a grinning Sumia began to twist the roster, before Chrom rescued it from her grasp. "Oh! Sorry."

Studying the now slightly crumpled paper, Chrom looked up with a confident air. "Looks like we've doubled our size." With a pleading gaze to the ceiling, Robin just hoped the majority of these people could actually play an instrument. As Stahl stood up, Robin mimicked him. Although the school clubs had the entire fourth period to clean up, most of the tables were gone or going.

The four, joined by Gaius, quickly cleaned away the table, chairs and baked goods. Between Stahl and Gaius, the only plate to be thrown away was Sully's blackened… something. As Stahl left for his class, the remaining band members lingered in the hallway. Gaius began to drift off, but Sumia snagged his shoulder before the boy got too far. "Hang on, Gaius." Liberating a slice of her pie from the boy's precarious tower of sweets, Sumia held it out to Chrom. "Here." Rather pink, the brunette thrust the paper plate at Chrom with both hands. "It's your favorite, as a thank you for your kind words a few days ago." Running a hand up and down his arm, Chrom seemed hesitant.

"Like hell," Gaius growled. Before Robin could stop him, Gaius whipped the pie out of Sumia's grasp, just as Chrom reached for it. "I got it first, Stumbles. If Chrom wanted the pie he should've grabbed it when he got the chance." Mouth wide open, Sumia just stared at him. "Sweets are serious business." Glaring at Sumia, who was still horrorstruck, and Chrom, who looked a little bemused, Gaius licked the pie slice. "Mine." Robin just rolled her eyes. Resolving to let Chrom sort out that headache, Robin wandered off to class, musing over the new band members, who were likely to provide her with a headache of her own, and Cordelia, who was promising to be trouble as well.

End Notes

Feel free to tell me what you think. This is my first fanfic and my first work of fiction period, so anything helps! Also, while I have some pairings decided, others aren't, so pairing suggestions are welcome, too!

See ya around!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!